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OR, The Rival Ranchmen.

BY OLL COOMES,
AUTHOR OF "VAGABOND JOE," "WHIP-KING
JOE," "OLD TOM RATTLER," ETC.

CHAPTER I.
DOCTOR DAVE'S CABIN.

A BLUE, smoky haze hung weirdly over the Laramie Plains, dimly vailing the rugged outlines of the far-off Snowy Range and mellowing the fierce rays of an early September sun.

Along an old Indian trail, running northward across the plains into the foot-hills of the mountains, a young man in the garb of a ranchero

[THE LIGHT REVEALED THE LITHE FORM AND PRETTY, DUSKY FACE OF THE PRINCESS RAVEN EYES, STANDING UNMOVED BEFORE THEM!]

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ing gallop, while yet the western sky.

the horseman, was a young man, and possessed of a fine ear, bright blue eye, and an intelligent countenance.

owner of a small cattle-ranch, a little tributary of the river. He was well known far and wide among hunters, and even among the Indians, for his hospitality, his intelligence and

stern pluck and energy, and his tact, young Temple had been in the cattle business some three years. His introduction. His herd was numbered his cattle by the while others counted by the as young, hopeful and contented for the wealth of the cattle

mile ride over the plain, the entered the hill country, and many miles, finally drawing rein at a humble log cabin in a little mountain surrounded by towering pine-clad

bin was the home of a man named better known as "Doctor Dave," and the "White Medicine." He had lived there for long before the Laramie Plains had been a cattle-range—when the country was under the dominion of the Sioux. For years he had been the medicine-man of the red-skins, and upon more than one occasion had he led a war-party to victory against hostile red-skins. And thus, as war-chief and medicine-man, had the strange and mysterious David Bond forever made the Sioux his friends.

Dismounting, Dan Temple hitched his horse and approached the cabin. At the door he was met by the daughter of Doctor Dave, and, had it not been that he had met her oftentimes before, he must have been amazed by the entrancing beauty and grace of the little mountain fairy, Alfa Bond.

Few would have thought that in the veins of this fair girl was a trace of Indian blood. But, such was the case. David Bond had married a woman whose father was a French Canadian, a man of education and culture, and whose mother was the daughter of an Indian chief by a white wife.

Alfa Bond was not over seventeen. She had a slender, graceful form; dark, liquid blue eyes, beaming with an expression as mild and chaste as an infant's; features clear-cut and intelligent, and lips just full enough to show the red, curved lines of the mouth. A wealth of dark-brown hair hung in two long braids at her back. She was dressed in a very neat and pretty garb of an Indian maiden, but wore no jewelry or ornaments of barbaric finery.

"Good-evening, Miss Alfa!" Dan Temple saluted, as she appeared in the doorway.

The maiden acknowledged his salutation with a little confusion, for she had not been aware of his presence until she met him at the door, but, at the same time, her surprise appeared to be a very pleasant one. She invited the young ranchman into the cabin, and in her words and actions showed that he was an agreeable caller.

"I'm sorry to say, Mr. Temple," she said, as Dan seated himself, "that father is out, and may not be in for some time."

"His absence is quite a fortunate thing for me," Dan replied, "for, to tell you plainly, Alfa, I've come to see you and git your answer to my proposal of a month ago."

"Mr. Temple," Alfa responded, her pretty face flushed and her bosom heaving with some inward emotion, "I have made up my mind not to leave my father's home so long as he lives. I am all he has in the world to love and care for, and to leave him alone, I never could; and, as for him giving up this hermit's life, he declares he never will. So it seems to me, Mr. Temple, my first duty is to my father."

"All very true, Alfa, I must honestly confess," Dan responded, a look of sore disappointment on his fine face; "but, what makes me most anxious is your personal safety. Your father looks for immunity from danger from his old friends, the Sioux; but, year by year they are dropping further back into the hills until it is now thirty miles or more to the nearest village. Meantime, you have grown to womanhood, a very charming womanhood, and as these hills are becoming infested with bad men, I regard you as no longer secure, here. Why, it was less than a year ago that the notorious Kettle Jack abducted the daughter of a prominent ranchman and forced her into marriage with him, the brute! It would be much safer if

your father would take up his abode in the Indian village, if he could not be prevailed upon to go elsewhere."

"This little valley is very sacred to him, Mr. Temple," Alfa replied, "because it is where my dear mother lies buried."

"While that is very true, and speaks volumes for the devotion of your father to the memory of his dead wife, and the place that holds her sacred dust, I believe it is true, also, that he would not let this stand in the way of your safety were he fully apprised of the dangers that are gathering around you. At any rate, I mean to speak to him about it at the first opportunity."

"You are very kind, Mr. Temple," the girl said, a light of undisguised admiration beaming in her eyes; "but, father is a strange man, you know."

"He always struck me, Alfa, as one with a secret sorrow. He is a man of education and quite wonderful knowledge considering how isolated has been his life, and it is a mystery to me why he should spend his days among Indians and in these dreary hills. Mind you, I do not believe for a moment it is because of any wrong he may have done, for I am sure David Bond is incapable of evil."

"Oh, thank you! thank you!" cried Alfa, joyfully; "to hear this from you is most gratifying to me. Another gentleman that comes to see us occasionally has urged us to leave here and go to Laramie to live because the suspicion was gaining credence that father was, himself, an outlaw, or the friend of outlaws."

"That man was no gentleman, but a knave, Miss Alfa," Dan declared with emphasis; "I mistrust who the fellow is, and the object he had in view. But, Alfa—"

The sound of a footstep outside and a sharp rap on the half-open door, cut short the young ranchman's words, and Alfa, rising, opened the door to admit the very person Daniel Temple had in mind, Clinton Roper, who was now accompanied by a man—a stranger to both Dan and the maiden.

CHAPTER II.

BAD BLOOD.

CLINTON ROPER was a person of thirty years, with a tall and splendidly formed physique, and a face that would have been handsome had it not been for the visible traces of dissipation upon it. He was the owner of the Cross-Bar Ranch, and a rival of Dan Temple, not only in the cattle-business, but for the hand of Alfa Bond. Possessed of a jealous and sinister nature he had, for some time, striven hard to injure and disgrace young Temple, at the same time professing friendship to his face. But Dan had been fully aware of his double-dealing, and quietly bided the time when a reaction would bring an exposure of the man's duplicity, as well as his associations with certain strangers whose coming and going between the mountains and Cross-Bar Ranch had a very suspicious look.

That he was surprised to find young Temple at Doctor Dave's there was little doubt; but, with an air of affected indifference, he greeted Alfa and the ranchman warmly, and to both introduced his companion as Ira Bondurant, a gentleman from the East.

The latter was a man of fifty years. He was a pleasant, business-like-looking gentleman whose garb and address were not of the West. These facts, Dan Temple noticed at a glance.

Roper at once inquired for Doctor Dave, and Alfa informed him that her father had taken his rifle and gone out for a short hunt in the hills.

It was not a great while, however, until the hermit returned. He was a man of five-and-fifty years, with snow-white hair and beard, and a kindly and intelligent face.

Clint Roper introduced the old man to Mr. Bondurant, adding:

"I met Mr. Bondurant in Laramie a week ago, and finding out he was looking for a man of your description, I prevailed upon him to accompany me to Cross-Bar Ranch, and make you a visit, I having promised to escort him here from my ranch. If you are the person he seeks he certainly has some pleasant news for you."

Doctor Dave started and glanced at the stranger in a manner that evinced some uneasiness; then as a smile wreathed his lips, he said:

"Mr. Bondurant has certainly struck the wrong trail."

Before the stranger could reply Dan Temple arose, bid his friends good-by and took his leave.

He thought that Mr. Bondurant's visit might be of a private nature, hence his departure.

Dan did not notice that Clint Roper had followed him out until he had reached his horse and heard his name spoken from behind. Turning he found himself confronted by the Cross-Bar proprietor, upon whose face there was a look of malignant scorn and derision.

"Dan Temple, I desire a word with you before you go," the ranchman said curtly.

"With pleasure, sir," responded Dan.

"I want an apology, sir, from you!" Roper said.

"For what?" questioned Dan.

"Before I rapped upon that partly open cabin door, a few minutes ago, on my arrival here with Mr. Bondurant," the ranchman explained, "I paused long enough to hear you denounce me as a knave to Miss Bond."

"You heard me use no name," replied Dan.

"It was well understood by Alfa whom you meant, sir," Roper retorted, "and you made the remark as a reflection on my character, and I—"

"Clint Roper!" exclaimed Dan with an air of provoking defiance, "I have no apology to make. If the shoe fits you, wear it!"

"Dan Temple!" retorted Roper, red with anger, "you shall swallow that insult unless you're a better man than I!"

"Which I certainly am," coolly responded the young ranchman; "and as this is no place to settle the matter, you've only to come with me down the valley, or name the time and place, and you can have sweet satisfaction."

"I'll send a man to your ranch to-night to make all necessary arrangements and, in the mean time, Dan Temple, you can order your grave dug, or make up your mind to apologize in Alfa's presence," and turning, the wrathful ranchman returned to the cabin, while young Temple mounted and rode away.

Roper re-entered the cabin, all smiles, just in time to hear Doctor Dave make this admission:

"I'll confess, Mr. Bondurant, that my name once was Powell D. Mitchell, but for twenty-five years it has been 'David Bond,' 'Doctor Dave,' and 'White Medicine.' Why I left civilization, and have tried to blot it from my memory, is my own secret; but I thank God that I can say it was for no crime of mine."

"And have you never heard from your friends in all these years, doctor?" asked Bondurant.

"Not one word," answered the hermit.

"Well, the fact is, doctor," said Bondurant, "your father died but ten months since."

"Indeed?" exclaimed Bond, an expression of sadness passing over his face.

"He died, aged eighty-one, and his last words were of his son, Powell."

"Poor old man!" sighed the hermit, his eyes filling with tears; "may Heaven forgive me if I permitted my troubles to add one grain of bitterness to his life."

"He always spoke kindly of you and your sorrow, and up to the last hour hoped to see you before he died. But, doctor, he is gone to a better reward, and has left all his wealth to you—a cool quarter of a million in cash and bonds."

"Why to me?" exclaimed the hermit; "what need of wealth have I? In this humble cabin, my rifle and my child here, I have all the riches I desire."

"But, you are growing old, doctor, and you cannot always be a hunter; you are liable to sickness and injury. Your daughter might be taken from you by death or—some of these handsome young ranchmen who, I observe, see an attraction in the home of Doctor Dave, already."

Alfa blushed crimson and a confused smile played about her lips, while the brow of her father contracted slightly as with a twinge of pain.

"Should any contingency arise," the hermit replied, "whereby I should become helpless or dependent, I could find devoted friends among the Indians whom I have served for a quarter of a century."

"Then let your daughter take your inheritance," urged Bondurant, "for it goes to you or your issue. In case you or any of your children were never found, then all was to go to charity."

"My dear sir," said Bond, "I have admitted that my name is Powell Mitchell, but are you sure that I am that man? Are you satisfied I am not an impostor? You explained to me your business here in such a manner that I could easily have acknowledged I was the man you sought."

"That's all very true, doctor," replied Bondurant, "but there is a combination of circumstances that lead me to know you are the man I

seek. One of these is your resemblance to your father."

"Well, well," returned the hermit, glancing with a look of deep solicitude at his daughter, "I want time—a day or two to think this matter over."

"That I will grant," assured Bondurant, "for I am bound to know before I leave here what I am to do with your father's wealth, all of which lies in an Ohio bank in cash, bonds and securities. Moreover, I think I shall enjoy a day or two of rest in this little Paradise-like Park."

"Then you will not return with me to my ranch?" Clint Roper observed.

"No; but I shall keep my promise and stop over a day or two with you before I depart the country."

"Then I had better be going, for it is not long until night, and I've a long ride before me. You may keep my horse here, Mr. Bondurant, until you come down to the Cross-Bar. You'll be likely to need him. Miss Alfa has a superb little pony, and is a superb rider, and I advise you to have her ride with you to Palisade Park before you leave, for it's one of the most romantic spots in Wyoming. So, I will bid you all good-evening."

The ranchman took his departure, Doctor Dave going out with him to where his horse was hitched to see him off.

"Mr. Roper is a very pleasant and hospitable gentleman," remarked Ira Bondurant to Alfa, as the ranchman departed.

"Yes, sir," Alfa replied, "he has been very good to us, and yet, I am selfish enough, Mr. Bondurant, to wish Clinton Roper knew nothing of your mission here."

"Why, Miss Bond?" the man asked, in surprise.

"While you were talking," Alfa exclaimed, "strange expressions passed over his face; he glanced at you and father in a nervous way, and all the while seemed uneasy and restless. I may be wrong, Mr. Roper, but, Mr. Bondurant, I have little confidence in him."

"Woman's instinct is more penetrating than man's, I'll confess," admitted Mr. Bondurant, "but if I am any judge of human nature, Alfa, you are mistaken as to the big-hearted ranchman."

"I hope so," was Alfa's response, but it was plain to see that she still adhered to her opinion of Clinton Roper.

CHAPTER III.

THE DUEL.

BRUSH CREEK and Cross-Bar Ranches were only five miles distant from each other. The employers of each had always been on the friendliest terms, despite the dislike of Clinton Roper for Dan Temple.

Roper was the first to locate in that part of the country, and regarded Temple's coming there as an infringement of his rights of priority, hence his feelings against the young ranchero. Temple had been fully aware of Roper's enmity, but, regarding his right to the public domain as good as that of any other man, he resolved to stand by it. No words, however, had ever passed between them until the day Roper attacked Temple in front of Doctor Dave's cabin, and challenged him for an apology or a fight for words he had overheard spoken by Temple.

If Roper had had an idea that Dan Temple would make a retraction rather than fight he was sadly mistaken, and that his hot-headed haste had got him into a serious predicament from which there was no backing down.

And, true to his promise, the ranchman sent one of his men, Jack Dean, up to Brush Creek Ranch to arrange terms with Temple's second, for the fight. It was past noon the next day after the challenge, however, before Roper's man came, and Temple was not a little surprised to learn that Roper had not returned from Doctor Dave's until the middle of the forenoon, that day.

Jack Dean and "Broncho" Dick, Temple's man, held a short conference and considered the possibility of first trying to bring about a settlement of the trouble between their employers without bloodshed. Two or three trips were made by the men between the two ranches that afternoon. Each principal was willing to compromise the difficulty if the other would make a written apology. The effort to settle, consequently, proved a failure, and it was arranged for the fight to come off the next morning at ten o'clock, the usual sunrise hour for duels being disregarded by the seconds.

Another new feature was to be introduced in this fight; as Winchester rifles of 45—90 caliber were to be the weapons, a thousand yards was

to be the distance between the combatants at the beginning of the fight. After the first shot the duelists, if neither of them had been hit, were to advance toward each other, firing at will until one or the other was killed or placed *hors du combat*.

The place selected for the duel was "The Sand Trough," a long, deep, sand-covered basin in the foot-hills some five miles from Brush Creek Ranch. It was nearly a mile in length by perhaps eighty rods in width. On one side an unbroken chain of high, wooded bluffs rose like a mighty wall, while on the other side the bluffs were broken and cut by defiles that trended away into the mountains.

At the appointed hour for the duel the ranchmen and their respective friends appeared in The Sand Trough. A thousand yards were measured off, lots cast for position and then each man and his friends rode down to his end of the range. A man was stationed midway between, and to one side of the duelists to give the signal for the shooting match to begin.

After the principals had reached their positions, dismounted, and strapped a belt of fixed ammunition about their middles, filled the magazines of their rifles and bid their friends good-by, they signaled their readiness for business to the man down the range.

The seconds and their friends now rode off some twenty rods to one side, for, at that distance, glancing bullets were liable to take a wide range.

Each second was provided with a field-glass, and closely watched the movements of his opponents.

Suddenly a puff of smoke was seen to burst on the air, down the field, and was immediately followed by the report of a gun. It was the signal for the fight.

The first shots from the duelists' rifles quickly followed, and almost together.

Clint Roper's bullet fell fully thirty rods short of the mark, dashing up a cloud of sand, while that of Temple went to the right and beyond his adversary.

Roper's second shot was still short, but he was gradually getting the range.

Advancing toward each other with quick footsteps, they continued firing.

Their friends moved along abreast of them, in deep and terrible suspense.

Roper had emptied the magazine of his rifle—sixteen shots—in going a hundred paces. He stopped to reload. Young Temple, who had made but ten shots in the mean time, ceased firing, also—not because his enemy had, but because of the sudden appearance from the bluffs on the right of the basin of a horseman, who galloped across the range, and drew rein midway between and directly in line with the duelists.

An exclamation of surprise burst from the lips of Broncho Dick, who saw at a glance, through his glass, that the horseman *was a woman!* But this fact Dan Temple quickly perceived with the unaided eye, and, what was more, he recognized her, despite the distance, as Alfa, the daughter of Doctor Dave!

Standing on a line between the duelists, she excitedly waved a white handkerchief above her head, as if in appeal for a cessation of hostilities.

It quickly flashed through Temple's mind that her presence there was the work of his and Roper's seconds, who had tried every other means to avert a conflict. But, be this as it may, the young ranchman, thoroughly ashamed of the business in which the girl had found him, declined to fire another shot in her presence, even if he could have done so without endangering her life.

Clint Roper was less conscientious. Having taken in the situation, he swore Alfa's presence was a ruse of Temple's to help him out of his difficulty, and he again opened fire on Dan; the distance requiring an elevation, he knew that would carry his bullets high above the girl's head. However, he had fired but three shots thus, when there came another interruption to the unique duel of a most startling character.

It was the sight of half a score of mounted savages, who burst like a whirlwind from the bluffs, and with demoniac yells rode straight toward the maiden!

CHAPTER IV.

A WILD RIDE.

FOR a moment or two the duelists and their friends stood as if stupefied, gazing at the yelling savages as they swept across the basin toward the girl.

Alfa, herself, was terror-stricken at sound of the red-skins' voices. She knew in an instant

that they were not the friendly outlaw or "wild" savages, too glad to strike a blow at slaying both her and her partner.

Turning toward Dan Temple she essayed to escape to them, anticipating such a movement the right, and urged their horse of speed to cut off her escape. Then a hideous wretch on a big horse rode alongside of her from her pony to a position in front of her, and another savage taking charge of her.

Then the whole party turned and galloped down toward Temple and his friends, the demon with the captive riding in advance.

"Dan!" exclaimed Broncho Dick, as he and his friends rode up to where the young ranchman stood, "we're in for a fight or a foot-race!"

Dan Temple made no response, but dropping upon one knee he raised his rifle, took careful aim, and fired.

One of the foremost Indian's pony went down, but in a moment the red-skin was up and astride of Alfa's animal.

A second and a third shot was fired by Dan, when, all of a sudden, the foe turned and galloped away toward the bluffs, one of their number evidently mortally wounded, for he had to be supported on his horse by a friend riding at his side.

By this time Clint Roper and his friends were in their saddles riding furiously across the basin as if to reach the bluffs ahead of the red-skins. This, however, they failed to do, but they turned into a defile some distance from the one taken by the foe and disappeared from view of the Brush Creek men.

Leaping into his saddle, Dan Temple exclaimed:

"Broncho, you come with me to the cabin of Doctor Dave, and, boys, the rest of you hasten to the ranch, for I fear a general raid is being made all along the line. The duel is postponed for the present."

The young ranchman and his friend, Broncho Dick, now dashed away across the Sand Trough, heading for the home of Doctor Dave, fifteen or twenty miles away. Their ponies were animals of tested endurance, and they knew exactly what speed they could stand for a given distance, and that speed they maintained to its utmost.

"We must reach the cabin and warn the doctor of Alfa's peril," Dan declared; "if the maiden's captors have not already been there and—"

"Dan," spoke Broncho Dick, "I am afraid they have, and that Alfa, escaping, came south for help, the red devils pursuing her."

"Ah! I had mistrusted that her presence in the basin was your and Jack Dean's work."

"Not at all, Dan," assured Broncho.

"Then it's the doings of Clint Roper!" decided Temple.

"That may be," replied Dick, "for Jack Dean told me yesterday that he thought his boss had some other big scheme on hand than the duel. But what object he could have in draggin' that gal down here I can't conceive."

"Time will tell, Dick," responded Temple.

Swiftly the miles glided behind the rancheros, and they were nearing the cabin of Doctor Dave when Broncho suddenly observed:

"Dan, it seems to me there's smoke in the air from burning pine."

"There's a fire somewhere about, sure," declared Temple.

The deep, pine-clad hills around them shut off all view, but when they at length dashed into the little park wherein stood the home of the hermit, the source of the smoke fell with appalling surprise upon their eyes.

The cabin of Doctor Dave was in flames, and almost wholly consumed.

"Great God!" cried Temple, "the work of the old hermit's enemies has been complete."

Without another word they rode on up to the burning hut, where they were greeted with a spectacle of horror that made them sick at heart. In front of the burning cabin lay Doctor Dave, his white hair and beard covered with blood. He was dead, and had been scalped, which fact told that his death was the work of the wild red-skins.

"Heavens!" exclaimed Temple, "this is horrible! Only two days ago I begged of Alfa to induce her father to leave this lonely, dangerous place. The doctor knew he had enemies among the red-skins, as well as friends. It is the work of the lawless devils that infest the Wind River country, and there will poor Alfa be taken! Broncho, she shall be rescued if it costs me my life. I shall mount and ride at once for the cabin of Norway Nels, the big Scandinavian hunter, and procure his assistance. You re-

for Dave to a place of burial can be secured, Indian village of Walk- what has befallen their have him send warriors on ductors. It's a long, fifty but you are good for it, and may God speed you on

the excited, and now thor- ing ranchero, turned away in and set off on his jour- Norway Nels, far up in the ns, his brain in a feverish irl of excitement. As he galloped away through the silent hills, eye and ear on the alert for lurking danger, he made a careful review of the events of the past two days; and, while thus engaged, it suddenly occurred to him that he had never once thought of Doctor Dave's visitor, Ira Bondurant, while he stood at the dead man's side. And now the queries arose in his mind: what was the object of his visit at Doctor Dave's?—where was he now?—had he gone away with the man who had taken him there, or had he fallen a victim to the savages' vengeance, also?

The more he pondered over the matter, the stronger became the conviction that the visit of Ira Bondurant at the hermit's had something to do with the present terrible state of affairs. Just why this thought was forced upon his mind, he could not tell. It seemed to come intuitively—unbidden. There was nothing suspicious about the man. He had the appearance of an honest and honorable gentleman.

From the cause that led to the death of Doctor Dave, if there was any other than the pure revengeful cussedness of the old man's murderers, Dan Temple turned his thoughts to the possibility of rescuing Alfa. To secure the assistance of Norway Nels, a noted young hunter, and friend of his, was his first thought. That individual was familiar with every canyon, defile and trail in that part of Laramie Mountains; but just what they could do, after they had found the maiden's abductors, against great odds must be determined when that time came.

The ride before the young ranchman was a long and tedious one, through rocky canyons, and long deep defiles, and over steep and broken hills. In ascending and descending the latter, he dismounted and walked in order to husband the strength of his noble horse.

The sun crossed the noon line and swung slowly down the western sky—too fast, however, for the eager, untiring young ranchero.

On and on he pressed and, finally, he entered little park-like valley on the opposite side of which, nestled close in under the brow of a green-clad bluff, he beheld the longed-for goal, the cabin of Norway Nels.

Five minutes later he dismounted in the doorway of the hunter's home.

CHAPTER V.

THE "RED RIVER ROGUES."

"THERE it comes, Dan—an old roachback! Plug him abaft the ear and I'll hold in reserve you fail to down the shaggy brute!"

The speaker was Norway Nels, the Mountainer, and his words were addressed to Dan Temple, the ranchero.

Although scarcely out of his teens, Norway Nels was a splendid type of physical manhood, standing six feet in his moccasins, broad-shouldered, deep-chested, with great muscular limbs and a large, finely-shaped head covered with light-colored shaggy locks, he was a young Hercules, indeed. His big, boyish face, bright and intelligent, beamed with good-nature. His large, blue eyes sparkled with the light of a dash- ing, fearless, free-born spirit. He was dressed in a full suit of buckskin, and armed with a heavy sharp's rifle, a pair of big navy revolvers, and a huge hunting knife.

Norway Nels, as the sobriquet implied, was a Norwegian by birth, but he had grown to man- hood in America where he had obtained a com- mon school education, so that no one could have told that he had ever spoken any other than the English tongue.

Having drifted into the game regions when fifteen years of age, he became infatuated with the life of a hunter, and adopted that call- ing.

After serving an apprenticeship, as it were, of two years under an old-timer, he finally bucked out by himself, and the name of Norway Nels, the Big Boy Hunter, became noted in the Big Horn, the Wind River and the Laramie Hill country, not only on account of his skill as a hunter, but for his great physical strength and comitable courage.

By the side of the Scandinavian giant, Dan Temple was a mere boy. The two were great friends, and hence it was that in his dire extremity Dan turned to the big hunter first of all.

On reaching the mountaineer's cabin, after his long, hard ride, the young ranchero had the good fortune to find Nels at home. He lost no time in making known the object of his visit, and his story was no sooner told than the young giant was up and ready for action; and, within half an hour after reaching the hunter's home, the two departed for Big Horn Canyon wherein Nels thought it possible they might intercept Alfa's captors.

It was nearly dusk when they reached the canyon after a hard tramp over a ten-mile series of rough and rugged hills, and as the pangs of hunger were being felt, especially by Dan, the first thing that was offered as a means of food was a big bear that came walking down the canyon. The two were concealed in a fringe of bushes at the base of the bluff and, as the bear approached them, Nels uttered the words with which this chapter opens.

Dan was to take the first shot, and Nels the second if it was necessary.

When the bear was nearly opposite them Temple drew back the hammer of his rifle. Its click caught the acute ear of the animal, and, with a "woof," it stopped and sniffed the air.

"Plug him, Dau'l!" whispered the hunter.

Dan was in the act of sighting his rifle when a gun, a few rods to their right, rung out with a sharp report and the bear dropped dead in its tracks!

Lowering his weapon Temple turned to Norway, a look of deep surprise on his face. So close had the report of the rifle sounded that at first he thought Nels, growing impatient, had shot the bear. But he saw at a glance that the young giant was as much surprised as him- self.

"Who fired that shot, Nels?" he quickly asked.

"By whaley! I don't know," responded Nels, "but it was a thievin' shot whoever fired it! I hope the red-skins— Ah! harkes, pard!"

Footsteps were heard approaching; then the tall form of a white man in hunter's dress emerged from the bushes and advanced toward the dead grizzly. He was a man of at least fifty years, with a short, stubby gray beard—a total stranger to Big Nels, but unquestionably a genuine borderer and hunter. But no longer hesitating, Norway stepped from his concealment and met the hunter face to face with the dead bear between them.

It was the stranger's turn now to be surprised, and it was readily made apparent that it was most complete by his stopping short and uttering the exclamation:

"Sword o' Gideon! shades o' Hercules! do mine ole optics deceive me? or do I, Polar Sol, Cold Wave o' the North, behold a part o' the mountain dissolve into a man?"

"Are you Polar Sol?" asked Norway, a smile flitting over his broad, handsome face.

"I'm that identical ole walrus!" announced the hunter with a feigned sigh of relief, "and I'll bet a homestead within a mile o' the North Pole that you're that Jumboian Infant, Norway Nels."

"That's who I am," replied Nels, "and this is my pard, Dan Temple, whom you robbed o' that bear. He war jist in the act o' touchin' trigger when you chipped in."

"I am sorry, Daniel," said the old hunter, "but I didn't know there was a soul within miles o' here 'cept my pard, Old Dismal."

"Then you've a companion?" observed Dan Temple.

"Here!" came a piping voice from the bushes, and a second stranger appeared on the scene—a low, rather heavy-set man with a round, full face, a small hooked nose and large staring eyes that gave him an owl's expression.

"This is him!" said Polar Sol, as the man came up, rifle in hand, a serio-comical expression on his solemn face; "this is my pard, Dismal Dave, and I can vouch for him bein' an Old Master when it comes to paintin' things scarlet in a fight. He's full o' wisdom as an owl—not handsome, but miserable good company. We two are twins, 'cept that Dis. was born a century afore I war. For fifteen odd years we've hunted, and fit Ingins, messed and lied together 'till we've become one and inseperable as the union o' States. For years we've been up in the Red River country, but a scarcity o' game forced us to yank stakes and pull this wayward. Yes, gentlemen, we're Polar Sol and Dismal Dave, the Red River Rogues, and our camp is around here in a rip in the mountains, and

you're welcome to its best. The parlor 'll be thrown open to your sway and, while I roll up a supper o' bear steak that'd make a mummy's mouth water, Old Dismal 'll give you a solo or two o' operatic music on his chin. Dismal's an old master with his chin. What do you say, boys? will you lodge with the Red River Rogues?"

"We'll be only too glad to," answered Dan Temple, as the possibility of securing their assistance in rescuing Alfa occurred to him.

So Polar Sol and Norway set to work to secure a portion of the bear for supper, Old Dismal and Dan looking on and discussing matters incident to their surroundings.

While thus engaged, a loud, wolfish bark suddenly burst upon their ears. It came from down the canyon, and was immediately followed by a chorus of fierce yelps and houndish barks that seemed to emanate from the jaws of a hundred Cerberuses.

Starting quickly, Norway Nels with one sweep of his big knife, slashed a large-sized chunk of meat from the bear's haunch, then sheathing his knife snatched up the meat and and his rifle saying:

"Come, men, or we'll be devoured alive! That's a pack o' them cussed Montana-Wyoming wild-dogs! They're wuss than belted thunder—the most dangerous brutes that run these hills!"

CHAPTER VI.

INTRUDERS IN THE ROGUES' CAMP.

DAN TEMPLE and the "Red River Rogues," as Polar Sol had called himself and companion, had often heard of the ferocious wild-dogs of the mountains, but had never seen one.

Nels, however, had, and knew the brutes to be far more dangerous than the fierce timber wolves. Hunting in great packs there was nothing they would not attack, from a man to a family of ferocious silver-tip bears, and so the young hunter had no desire to meet them, but hastened away followed by Dan and the two old hunters.

Up the side of the bluff he led the way until he reached a ledge, above which some six feet, was another jutting out.

"Pards, let's mount this shelf," suggested the young stalwart, "and watch and defy the brutes. Here, Dan'l, let me boost you up."

He lifted Temple as though he were a child, and without difficulty the young ranchero gained a position on the ledge. Polar Sol and Old Dismal were helped in a similar manner; the guns were passed up and then Norway himself, aided by his friends, climbed upon the rock.

This position had been gained none too soon, nor could it have been more favorable for a view of the defile before them.

Drawn in the direction of the dead bear by the scent of warm blood, the dogs swept up to the spot like an angry torrent. They struck the carcass at a run, and the foremost of the pack, which was full fifty strong, stopped so sudden that the whole pack was piled in a writhing heap over and around the roachback. For five minutes or more a desperate struggle ensued among the dogs, and when all had regained a footing, not the half of them could get near the bear. But, rendered frantic by the smell of blood, those on the outside leaped upon the backs of others, and thus endeavored to reach the carcass by clambering over the closely impacted bodies of the shaggy mass. And thus, like a great caldron, the pack kept boiling up from the outside and sinking down in the center.

"What do you think o' that, friends?" asked Nels, turning to his companions.

"It's the devil's own stew-pot!" declared Polar Sol.

"And it's a wonder, Sol," added Dismal, "that they didn't get round and pick our bones. I've long heard o' the Montana wild-dogs, but never dreamed o' strikin' the ugly brutes in this kentry."

"There has been a pack or two seen in this Territory, but not so far south as this before," Nels explained.

"Why not open on them?" asked Dan Temple.

"It would be a waste of powder and lead," answered Norway, "unless we have to go to shooting to save our bacon; but I think they'll leave when they devour that carcass."

And so they did; but it was more than two hours before the feast had been finished and the last of the dogs had departed. In the mean time, night had fallen, the darkness being deep and dense in the canyon.

When assured of the dogs being beyond sound or scent, the four descended from their perch and started for the camp of the Rogues.

Norway Nels, the Big Boy Mountaineer.

"Polar," remarked Old Dismal, as they groped their way from the canyon into the defile in which their camp was located, "it 'd be a splendid state o' affairs to get back and find our camp outfit and pack-horses 'd gone off inside o' them frisky canines, wouldn't it?"

"In that case Nels 'd have a pair o' homeless orphans on his hands for a few days," answered Sol.

"You're just the kind o' orphans I'd like to share my roof with," declared Nels.

In the course of half an hour the hunters came in sight of their camp when Sol and Dismal stopped short, an exclamation of startling surprise escaping the lips of each.

When they left camp there was no fire, but, to their profound astonishment, they not only saw a bright fire burning there now, but saw a number of forms moving busily about within its radius of light!

"Sword o' Gideon!" exclaimed Polar Sol in an undertone, "our claim's been jumped—our camp infested!"

"Rattlin' thunder!" snapped Old Dismal, "they're a cheeky set o'—"

"Red-skins! Injins, by the great ornegollus!" broke in Nels.

"Norway, you're right!" affirmed Sol, after a second look at the moving forms about the fire.

"Dan, they are prob'ly Alfa Bond's captors—the very vandals we are after," exclaimed Norway.

"Then you're on an Injin hunt, eh?" asked Old Dismal.

Dan Temple explained their situation—related the story of Alfa Bond's capture, the death of her father, and his ride to the home of Norway Nels for help.

"Then, by the sword o' Gideon!" exclaimed Old Polar, "we have struck this country just in time. We, the Red River Rogues, are a Roman Legion—Old Masters on an Injin round-up. But, it's been years since we've had a full campaign—even a skirmish—with the smoked varmints, and we may be a little rusty, but it won't take long to git on a fine fightin' luster. Oh! it 'd do your soul good to see Old Dismal warp himself about in an Injin fight like a blacksnake in a bed o' hot ashes. I tell ye, Dis, is a Doric Dandy."

"And it strikes me," added Dismal, who had been watching the maneuvers of the red-skins, "that the sooner we're takin' on that luster the more property we'll have left, for the varmints mean to rob our camp."

The red-skins, seven in number, seemed quite busy in taking an inventory of the hunter's effects, and, finally, when their pack-horses were led up, it was evident that the plunderers meant to carry every thing away with them they could lay hands on.

The four whites were not over fifty paces from the camp, and, having hastily fixed upon a plan of action, they marched boldly into camp, Nels in the lead, and confronted the would-be thieves.

"Ho, here! you rusty-skinned gibbons!" shouted the big hunter, affecting a look of furious rage: "git out of this camp you thievin' imps, or we'll pulverize you! Git!"

The red-skins were evidently surprised, at least, by the presence of Nels. That they were intruders they were well aware, and that they were expecting the return of the owners of the property at any moment, was evident from their actions. But, while they were not counting upon the appearance of more than two whites, they put on a bold front, and a tall, slender fellow in the toggery of a chief bristled up with a show of fight, exclaiming, in reply to Norway:

"Waugh! Me Kicking Horse—me no coward! Kicking Horse bad Injin on fight—no 'fraud of bluster of big pale-face!"

"What you doin' here meddlin' with our trap, you mud-dyed varmints?" demanded Old Polar.

"This is the hunting-grounds of the Injins," replied the chief, "and all he finds here is his."

"Well, you find me here," Sol retorted, "and if you want me, step for'd and take me; and here's my ole, ancient chum, Dismal David; mebbe he's a long lost brother, and you'd like to embrace him? And, red-hide, do you see that big, tew-headed son o' Mars? Well, he's Kickin' Thunder, and if he lets hisself loose the wolves won't be able to find your pieces!"

"The old pale-face is full of wind like a bladder!" was Kicking Horse's rejoinder, "and the stick of a knife will make him sink down like a wet moccasin."

While Kicking Horse was thus delivering himself, a little, ferret-faced warrior leaped upon the back of one of the well-jaded pack-ponies as if he meant to impress the whites with his inten-

tion of riding it away; but, it was quite evident that his ostensible object was to provoke an attack by the whites, and in this he succeeded in a manner unlooked for.

Nels, standing within a few feet of him, made a spring, and, seizing the whiffet by the shoulder, jerked him off the pony so violently that his heels fairly cracked in the air; then, as if he had been but a worthless bundle of rags, he swung him around and hurled him with terrific force squarely against the stomach of Kicking Horse, knocking that worthy flat upon his back, almost breathless.

The Red River Rogues saw that now was their time and at once "sailed in." Nor was Dan Temple idle, but, side by side with the "Old Masters," took a hand in the knock-down.

Before entering camp the whites had agreed to shed no blood unless it was necessary, and so the attack on the foe was made with fist and foot, and so skillfully were these weapons applied by the athletic mountaineers that the savages were knocked out at the first round, and, as fast as their legs would carry them, or circumstances permit, they broke for the friendly cover of darkness, the last to go being Kicking Horse who was assisted in his departure by a vigorous kick from the sturdy Norwegian.

"Git thar, you mud-veneered thieves!" yelled the Big Hunter, as the blustering Kicking Horse went sailing into the darkness; "depart, you unclean devils from the camp o' the undefiled, and let the wild dogs eat you and die!"

"By the sword o' Gideon!" exclaimed Old Sol, "that was short and sweet! Dismal, how it brings the color to your old fallow face and the luster to your big eyes! It seems like old times to have even a bloodless whirl with the red-skins, don't it, Dis? Another one or two and the Red River Rogues will be tharselves ag'in. And, Norway Nels, you're the makin' o' an Old Master artist. You fling on the colors like a settin' sun, and by the time you git your growth you'll be—"

"Sol," interrupted Old Dismal, "rest yer lips before them red-skins rally and swat us from cover o' darkness. We've got to look out the rest of this night."

"Yes, for I have no doubt there are a number of Injins in this vicinity," added Nels; "but, men, I don't mean to be cheated out of my supper o' broiled bear-meat, but while it's bein' cooked a man ought to keep watch so that we're not surprised. As soon as our meat is cooked, the fire can be put out."

"I'll stand guard, Norway," said Old Dismal; "bring on your bear-meat!"

Nels procured his chunk of meat, and, having sliced it into strips, proceeded to broil it on the hot coals. This occupied but a short time and when Dismal came in the four hastened to partake thereof with keen relish.

They had scarcely finished their repast when, suddenly, from the darkness beyond the radius of the camp-fire's light, came the startling cry.

"Help! help! Oh, God! help me!"

It was a wild, imploring cry—the cry of a woman—a cry that the very echoes repeated, as if possessed of the instincts of a human soul!

CHAPTER VII.

KAMAS KIT, THE OUTLAW.

THE four men started at sound of that imploring cry. Mechanically their hands dropped to the revolvers in their belts. They had barely time to turn their eyes in the direction whence the sound came when there suddenly burst into the circle of light a slender, girlish figure upon whose fair face was the impress of terror, while back in the darkness could be heard the tramp of swift pursuing feet.

"Save me! save me!" burst from the girl's lips, and not until she had thus spoken did Dan Temple recognize in the terrified fugitive the daughter of Doctor Dave, Alfa Bond!

"My God! it's Alfa Bond!" burst from the young ranchman's lips, as he advanced toward the girl, who staggered into his arms barely conscious in her excitement and fear of his presence.

At the same moment, Nels and the Red River Rogues quickly advanced and placed themselves between the young people and the girl's pursuers, who suddenly burst from the shadows like so many wolves on the trail of a fawn. And human wolves they were!

There were eight of them—five white men and three savages. The party was headed by a tall, bearded, brigandish-looking man armed to the teeth, and who, rushing into the light, was brought to bay by the drawn revolver of Norway Nels.

Thus suddenly checked, the gang stood like baffled gladiators, glaring with red eyes after

"Stop there!" commanded a tone of no uncertain meaning, flashing eyes on the leader, do not attempt to raise a you—or it'll be your death—ver. "Amen!" shouted Polar Sol.

"Second the motion!" added Dismal, following his friend's example, his round, fat face flushed with excitement.

"Do you mean to defy us?" demanded the bearded villain, bristling up with an attempt to appear cool and defiant, his hand resting on the butt of a revolver.

"We certainly mean to protect that gal!" responded Nels.

"He is the outlaw, Kamas Kit!" cried Alfa, as she clung in terror to the arm the young ranchero.

A knowledge of that fact, however, Norway Nels already possessed. He had seen that red-handed villain before and knew him to be a desperado. And the presence of the Indians with him was sufficient evidence that they were in collusion with the outlaw.

While the hunters were loth to precipitate a conflict, they were, nevertheless, fully aware of the dangers of delay. The odds were already against them, and these were liable to be increased at any moment by the discomfited Kicking Horse and his followers.

"Yes!" exclaimed the outlaw in a tone calculated to overawe the hunters, "I am Kamas Kit, and you know what that means!"

"Yes, villainy! robbery! girl-stealing!" answered Norway, "and we warn you not to crowd on us!"

"Them's the warble!" put in Polar Sol. "I reckon you scoundrels hasn't sized up the Red River Rogues; but if ye want to do so, jist kadrille this way!"

"Blow and bluster I've heard before," sneered Kamas Kit; "it don't work with me. I demand that girl. She was placed in my care, and I mean to hold her in custody."

"Not much you don't!" replied Norway; and then, aside to Dan Temple he said: "Dan, escort the gal back into the shadows where she won't git hurt if we git to shootin'."

But, low as he spoke, the outlaw overheard him when, in turn, he spoke in a whisper to one of his white allies who immediately turned and retraced his steps into the darkness.

What this movement meant the hunters did not, at the time, understand. The outlaw could not have been sent for re-enforcements for, as Dan Temple with Alfa turned and started off up the defile, Kamas Kit advanced a step, grasping his revolver and exclaiming:

"Stop with that girl, or by the gods you'll wish you had!"

CHAPTER VIII.

A BLUNDER IN DARKNESS.

THE instant Kamas Kit made a step forward the arm of Norway Nels was extended and his big revolver pointed at the breast of the outlaw like the finger of doom; and as quickly was his example followed by the Red River Rogues.

Not another step did Kamas Kit take. On the contrary, he stopped and recoiled from those deadly tubes, a look of dismay on his wicked face. The villain, despite his superior force, still seemed loth to precipitate a conflict, and the hunters now began to mistrust that there was some scheme on foot to entrap them. As one thought after another was flashing through their minds, the crack of a revolver and a terrific scream burst upon their ears.

The shot and the cry came from the direction whence Dan and Alfa had gone, and they quickly told the hunters what the outlaws were up to; the man that had dropped back into the darkness had stolen around the camp under cover of the shadows and intercepted Dan and the maiden.

Determined to save the girl at all hazards the hunters, as if actuated by a single impulse, turned quickly and dashed away into the darkness up the defile.

"Halt, there!" yelled Kamas, sending a shot after the receding hunters, as he and his crowd started in pursuit.

The only attention, however, paid to his command was by Nels, who fired two shots backward over his shoulder as he lunged into the shadows, one of the bullets striking Kamas Kit's foot causing the villain to fall, howling and cursing with pain and rage.

Norway Nels, the Big Boy Mountaineer.

The outlaw put a momentary stop to the hunters, for his fall had been fatally injured, but his oaths, the writhing villain of the chase was continued. The hunters ran on. It was in the defile, and as no further check on Dan and Alfa could be made by means of locating friend or foe. However, they groped about with eye and ear on the alert.

Suddenly Nels stumbled against a prostrate body from whose lips escaped a feeble moan.

Stooping he fumbled over the body which he found to be that of a man, and as a terrible fear filled his mind, he exclaimed:

"Good Lord! Dan, is it you?"

A feeble affirmative answer was received.

The outlaws and savages were pressing close upon them.

Acting upon the first impulse, Nels lifted his wounded friend in his strong arms and bore him rapidly away. He had not gone far when his foot came in contact with another prostrate form, almost stumbling over it.

Polar Sol hastily examined it and, though it was still warm, pronounced life extinct.

"The youngster bulletted the smart outlaw, but where can the gal be?" the old hunter observed.

As no one of course, could answer, the three hurried on up the defile, Norway with his burden—the Red River Rogues following behind to cover his retreat.

A retreat of safety was finally secured some distance up the defile where they could for a time, at least, defy the enemy. To their happy surprise, however, the foe relinquished the pursuit long before they halted. At any rate, their random shooting and savage yelling had ceased.

The wounded man was placed upon the ground in as comfortable position as was possible under the circumstances. He was unable to speak, nor could the hunter determine the location or extent of his injuries so intense was the darkness.

The situation was indeed a desperate one. To strike a light would be to invite sure death, and yet without it they could do nothing for their wounded and, perhaps, dying friend. Alfa's fate was unknown, but with the hope of finding her hiding away somewhere in the darkness, Old Polar and Dismal left Norway with his helpless companion and went off in search for her.

The young hunter endeavored to draw from the wounded man some word as to his condition, but only an occasional feeble moan escaped his lips.

It was nearly an hour before the "Rogues" returned from the fruitless search for Alfa. They had carefully explored the defile down to their late camp, and made up their minds that, unless she had passed on up the defile ahead of them, she had been recaptured by Kamas Kit's minions. Of one thing they were dead sure, and that was of the outlaws and red-skins having carried off all their camp equipage.

In low tones the trio discussed the situation, and, while thus engaged, their attention was drawn to the wounded man, from whose lips escaped a sound that startled them.

"Ah!" exclaimed Old Polar, "that was his death-rattle! The boy's done for!"

"Poor Dan Temple!" sighed big Norway; "it's too bad! too bad! But, somebody suffers for it, mind what I tell you!"

Kneeling by the side of the prostrate form, the young hunter found his wrist, and laid his fingers upon the pulse. But the pulse had ceased to beat. The man was dead beyond a doubt.

Tenderly Norway proceeded to straighten out the lifeless limbs, fold the arms across the breast, so that when daylight came they could give it burial. While he was thus engaged, an exclamation of surprise burst aloud from his lips.

"Softly lad!" cautioned Polar Sol, "or we might get a broadside fired into our jib-boom. What's the matter?"

"I'm goin' to strike a match and get a glimpse of this dead man's face, if it costs me my skulpi!" responded the young giant.

And, producing a match, he struck it on a stone, and a tiny blue blaze pierced the gloom. Screening it in his "cupped" hands until it was in full blaze, he let the light flash upon the face of the dead.

A cry, half-surprise and half-joy, burst from his lips, and dashing the light out he arose to his feet.

"Belted thunder!" he snapped out in evident disgust, "that's not the body of my friend, Dan Temple, but of an outlaw that I lugged up here,

and been mournin' over in this purgatorian darkness!"

"Then that other body you stumbled against must 'a' been your friend's," opined Old Dismal, gloomily.

"I'm afraid so," responded Nels, sadly.

"He war dead, for sure," added Sol, who had examined the body.

"Well, it's a howlin' blunder on my part," Norway said, regretfully. "But it can't be helped now."

"It's not to be wondered at, Norway," Dismal observed, "in the hurry and darkness; and then the feller himself answered he war Dan, when you axed him the question. But, I reckon he war so nigh gone that he didn't know what he war sayin'. That's one thing certain, however, and that is that Dan got in his work on the outlaw."

"But what has become of that poor girl?" exclaimed Nels.

"As we're foot-loose now," suggested Polar Sol, "s'pose we go make a search for the varmints' camp, and if we find it, and that the gal has been recaptured, do some Old Master paintin'? I want you to see the Red River Rogues, Norway, lay on the sunset tints in a fight. Even if the gal isn't there, our hosses and camp-fixin's are, and that's enough for us."

The three hunters at once moved back down the defile, carefully searching for that second body Nels had stumbled against in their retreat. But they reached the smoldering embers of the Rogues' late camp-fire without finding it.

Retracing their footsteps, they repeated the search with no better result. The body was gone, and its whereabouts was as much a mystery to the hunters as was the fate of Alfa Bond.

CHAPTER IX.

RECONNOITERING THE ENEMY'S CAMP.

FROM the defile Nels led the way down to the main canyon, and then northward up that great pass in search of the enemy's camp. And not over two miles had they traveled when the lights of two or three fires pierced the gloom before them. That they were in the Indian-outlaw rendezvous they had no doubt, and so the next move was to reconnoiter the place and ascertain, if possible, if Alfa Bond was there a captive.

They soon discovered, however, that great risks must be incurred in getting close enough to obtain the desired information. The walls of the canyon were high and precipitous both below and above the camp, so that the place could only be approached from the north or south. These approaches the hunters knew would be well guarded, and as the canyon was narrow, it was not at all likely that they would succeed in their reconnoissance without having first silenced that guard.

But, whether that could be accomplished without raising an alarm was a question that the nerve and skill of the hunters must determine; and, with that object in view, they moved forward, keeping close along the base of the west bluff, that was skirted by a few pine bushes, and along which was strewn great rocks that the hand of time had dropped from the cliff above.

When about thirty rods from camp—at a point where the canyon began to suddenly widen—they discovered two men on guard. They could not see them, but could hear them as they paced to and fro across the canyon, passing each other near the center. One of them was an Indian, and the other a white man. This fact the old hunters could tell by their footsteps—that of the Indian being light and almost noiseless, while that of the other being heavier clad gave a louder sound.

To either dispatch these fellows or pass them was the next thing to be done. A whispered consultation was held and it was decided to attempt to pass the line. Every contingency likely to arise was fully discussed and plans of action in each instance agreed upon. Then the forward movement again was resumed.

Never did shadows move more noiseless. They had timed themselves so as to cross the line as the booted guard was approaching, satisfied that if he was a white man, his sense of sight and hearing would not be as acute as the savages'.

Norway Nels took the lead, his companions following close at his heels—all three crawling upon all-fours and carefully feeling every inch of the way before them.

Norway was almost on the line when the guard passed him to the end of his beat and

turned to retrace his steps. In fact, he was so close that the big hunter could touch him, but holding his breath until the sentinel had re-passed, he moved forward inside the dead-line, and soon the three were safe—beyond those guards, at least.

Halting to congratulate themselves upon their success, they again consulted as to the next step to be taken. Norway, who was familiar with every feature of the canyon, explained the situation to his companions.

"Now," he said, "we can rumble 'round here freely. East of that varmint-camp is a wide thicket of bushes extendin' back to the bluff where there's a nice spring of water. But I see from here the red-skins have got their horses hitched in there and our presence on that side might frighten the animals and lead us into trouble. On this side of the camp is, also, a fringe of bushes in which we can git within thirty paces of the camp. There's also a bear-den, or a kind of a cave, in the bluff there that we might find handy in case we war hard pressed."

"Then let's keep on this side," said Polar Sol.

They moved on and finally gained a point opposite the camp and in front of the Bear-Cave spoken of. From the base of the towering cliff the ground sloped gradually downward to the bottom of the canyon. This slope was covered with a growth of pine shrubbery three to five feet in height, but from their elevated position they could see over the thicket into the camp which was situated in the open valley.

Two or three fires lighted up the camp enabling the scouts to see all that was going on and yet not be seen.

They were somewhat surprised upon discovering no less than four-score persons in the camp. Two-thirds of these were Indians whom Norway Nels thought must be the thieving, cut-throat followers of a renegade chief called Gray Falcon, while the others were outlaws—followers of Kamas Kit.

A dozen rude lodges were pitched in a line north of, and fronting the fires.

Beyond the camp in the bushes could be seen a number of horses, the radius of light reaching out to the edge of the thicket.

On the ground in front of one of the lodges, and covered with a blanket, lay what looked like a man's form.

Nothing however could be seen of Alfa Bond. That bold, bad "Injin," Kicking Horse, was the most conspicuous figure in camp, and Nels's fingers fairly tingled to draw a bead on him.

To complete the group of notorious marauders, Kamas Kit finally appeared on the scene. He came hobbling from a tent with one foot bound up in a blanket, using a rifle for a crutch.

"Now if Old Gray Falcon would only show up," said Nels, "the scene would be complete, and—Ah! look there, pard! do you see that?"

"A gal—an Ingin princess, by the sword o' Gideon!" exclaimed Old Sol, thrusting his thumb into Dismal Dave's ribs.

True enough, a young woman dressed in the showy, glittering garb of an Indian princess emerged from one of the tents and, walking down to where that form lay covered with a blanket, stooped over and carefully drew the blanket aside.

"That's Raven-Eyes, Old Gray Falcon's daughter by an Ingin squaw," Norway announced. "She's a screamin' pretty little tigress as ever broke a heart or clawed an eye out. Her word and wish is law, and there isn't a buck in that camp but 'd scalp himself if Raven-Eyes 'd command him to."

"From here—at long range—she looks like a fairy," Polar Sol observed.

"Steady, Polar!" cautioned Old Dismal; "you know your failin' 'bout wimmin. Her grandmother would be a fairy in your eyes. Every thing that wears dresses is a fairy with you, Solomon—ah! that is a man lyin' there! He must be a sick Ingin."

As the girl drew down the blanket the scouts saw an arm reached out in a feeble, groping way.

"Yes, sir," declared Norway, "Raven-Eyes has got a patient on her hands, and I should say he was a pretty sick man the way he seemed to act."

They saw the maiden kneel by the sick man and adjust something about his head, then she arose and hurried away into a tent, returning shortly with a cup in her hand.

Again kneeling, she raised the sick man's head and held the cup to his lips, and after he had drank of the contents she assisted him to a sitting posture.

These proceedings seemed to have interested the group about the fire, for Kicking Horse and

two or three outlaws walked over and watched the girl and her patient a few minutes, then returned to their companions.

The hunters could see that the sick man's head was bandaged, and, after gazing at him steadily for some moments, Norway Nels said:

"Pards, I'm goin' to creep down to the edge o' this thicket, so's to git a closer look at that man and gal."

So saying, he dropped on all-fours and crawled away among the bushes down the slope. He was gone but a few minutes; then he returned in no little excitement.

"Belted thunder!" was his whispered exclamation, "that wounded man in the camp yonder is the ranchero, Dan'l Temple!"

CHAPTER X.

DAN TEMPLE IN A PREDICAMENT.

TRUE enough, Dan Temple was not only alive but a prisoner in the Indian camp.

It was his prostrate body against which Norway Nels had stumbled during his flight up the defile with the supposed form of his wounded friend.

While endeavoring to conduct Alfa to a place of safety, the outlaw, passing around the camp, had pounced upon him in the gloom; but despite the disadvantage at which he was thus taken, he succeeded in shooting the assailant, but before the latter fell he dealt Dan a blow with a heavy club that felled him senseless, and in this condition he lay when Polar Sol felt of his pulse and pronounced him dead. Thus the outlaws also found him, and, whether they could distinguish his body as that of friend or foe, or not, they carried it into camp.

After receiving the blow in the defile, Dan knew nothing more until he came to his senses in the red-skin camp. The first thing of which he became conscious was of a strange, murmuring noise that sounded like human voices far away. The first thing he saw was a face bending over him—a strange, yet comely face, but it was many minutes before he could dispel the confusion from his throbbing brain and collect his thoughts sufficiently to enable him to recall the past. When he had succeeded in doing this, he soon discovered the situation he was in—that the voices he heard were those of Indians and outlaws; that the face of the girl bending over him was not that of Alfa Bond, but of a stranger—in short that he was a prisoner!

But where was Alfa Bond? Where his gallant friends, Norway Nels and the fearless old Red River Rogues?

As these thoughts flashed through his mind he attempted to rise. With the assistance of the strange girl he succeeded in getting to a sitting posture.

"Thank you," he said in a feeble voice, looking up into the dusky face of the young princess; "you are very kind."

"Would you like a drink of water?" the girl asked, seeing he spoke with a husky voice.

"If you please; I am very thirsty," he responded.

The girl brought him a cup of water and held it to his lips, and again he thanked her kindly.

"You know where you are now, stranger?" the maiden remarked.

"I am in an Indian camp, I see," Dan responded, "but am I here through the kindness of the red-skins? or a prisoner?"

"You're a prisoner," the princess answered.

"Who are you?" Dan asked looking up into the girl's face.

"Raven-Eyes, the daughter of Gray Falcon."

"Is Alfa Bond here, Raven-Eyes?"

"The daughter of Doctor Dave, the White Medicine of the Sioux?"

"Yes."

"She is not here, but Carlos will bring her soon."

"Who is Carlos?"

"The man who struck you senseless in the darkness."

It was evident from this that the outlaws and Indians were ignorant of the death of their friend whose body Norway had carried away, and that they were expecting him in at any moment with Alfa.

Presently Kicking Horse and two or three outlaws seeing Dan had recovered consciousness, walked down to where he and Raven-Eyes were.

"Raven-Eyes," said the war-chief, addressing the girl, "has cooed the pale-face prisoner to his senses. She lingers long at his side forgetting her father, Gray Falcon, is sick in his lodge. Has the face of the captive stole Raven-Eyes' heart? Does she stand by him pouring words of love into his ear like oil into a jug?"

"Kicking Horse forgets he is but a war-chief, and is speaking to the daughter of Gray Falcon!" the girl replied reproachfully, her dark eyes flashing with a scornful light. "Raven-Eyes is not a giant like the big, pale-face hunter who kicked Kicking Horse out of his camp to-night, but she can strike to kill!"

Having thus expressed herself the princess turned and walked away to her lodge, leaving Kicking Horse smarting under her lashings.

"She's a screamer," remarked one of the outlaws to a comrade, "and'd put a knife 'twixt a feller's ribs in a wink's time if he crossed her."

Returning to the fire Kicking Horse sent a warrior to bind the captive. This was evidently done through spite for Raven-Eyes' rebuke.

The warrior bound Dan's ankles most securely. His hands he also tied together, but in front of him so he could lie down.

Kamas Kit now came and called on the captive and after addressing a few insulting remarks to him, turned away and walking across the camp entered one of the lodges.

He was greeted there by a white man of forty-five, whose face was covered with a long bushy beard, and who was dressed in buckskin trousers, a brown pea-jacket and a slouched sombrero.

"My dear Gascoyne," the outlaw said, as he entered the tent, "our mutual friend, Daniel Temple, is coming 'round like a June mornin'."

"But that girl, Alfa Bond, isn't coming 'round so rosy," replied the man, Gascoyne.

"Don't worry 'bout that girl," Kamas advised, "Carlos will bring her in in due time."

"Well, then I'll go and take our guest to call on Gray Falcon," Gascoyne said; "everything is in shape for the interview."

So saying this man left the lodge and proceeded to another into which he disappeared, casting a furtive glance at Dan Temple as he did so.

It happened that Dan's eyes were upon the man at the time, and there was something so suspicious about the fellow's actions that the young ranchman continued to watch the tent for the man's reappearance. Nor had he long to watch. Gascoyne came out accompanied by a man whom Dan, at a glance, recognized as the guest of Doctor Dave, Ira Bondurant!

CHAPTER XI.

A NEW CLAIMANT.

DAN TEMPLE'S first thought, upon seeing Bondurant, was that he too was a captive in the Indian camp; but he was led to change this view when he saw the man at perfect ease and liberty—under no surveillance or restraint.

When Dan's eyes met those of Bondurant, the latter stopped short and gazed in manifest surprise at the ranchero. It was quite evident that the man had been ignorant of Temple's presence up to that moment and he seemed about to speak to Dan when Gascoyne drew him aside into Gray Falcon's lodge.

Thus to the wounded man disappointment followed surprise, and he was left in painful meditation. The presence of Bondurant in that camp unharmed and, to all appearance, a guest instead of a prisoner, the death of Doctor Dave and destruction of his home, and the abduction of Alfa, formed a combination of facts in which the young man thought he could divine the work of the blackest of treachery. But, be this as it may, let us see how Bondurant came to be in the Indian camp.

The night he spent in Doctor Dave's cabin passed very pleasantly. He and the old hermit sat and talked until midnight. They talked of Doctor Dave's father and of people that the hermit had known in the town of Zanesville before he fled to the wild West, and of incidents that had transpired there while he was a resident of the place.

Then Bondurant gave a detailed account of his adventures of the past year in his search among the mining-camps, cattle-ranches and Indian tribes for Israel Mitchell's heir.

Finally they went to bed and slept soundly, arose early next morning and, having breakfasted, Alfa saddled up her pony and started

on a ride to Brush Creek

team and help to move

their mountain home p

East with Bondurant.

In the mean time, Bond

horse Clinton Roper had

and mounting, set off for

the canyon. Enraptured

picturesque scenery that

folded to his view, he rode

were greeted by the sound of

approach-

ing from behind.

Turning his horse he found himself con-

fronted by a horseman dressed in the suit of

a ranchman. He was a man of some thirty

years. His face was flushed with excite-

ment and his horse showed signs of hard

riding.

"Good-morning, sir; are you Ira Bon-

durant?" the man exclaimed as Bondurant

faced him.

"I am," answered the startled executor;

"who are you? and what do you want?"

"I am Joe Fisher," answered the man,

"and have come to warn you that the Ingins

have killed Doctor Dave and burnt his cabin

and that you'll meet a like fate if you return

there."

"Great heavens! Mr. Fisher, this surely

cannot be!" Bondurant cried, trembling with

excitement.

"It's a fact, sir," the man declared, "and

it's no more than's been expected for some

time—ever since the Ingins over which he

exercises such an influence moved north'ard

and left him settin' there alone. Doctor

Dave had scores o' enemies among other In-

gin tribes 'cause he'd incited his tribe to

bloody war 'gainst them. He war an ole

fool stayin' there with his pretty gal all

alone. He might 'a' known her face alone

would 'a' brought him trouble, and now it's

come. But I'm told your presence in his

cabin hastened the end."

"Why my presence?" exclaimed Bon-

durant.

"That's all I can tell you, sir, for it's all I

know. There are others that will explain all

to you, I presume."

"Fisher," said Bondurant in deep per-

plexity, "I cannot see through this story of

yours."

"I presume not, sir," replied Fisher,

"and I don't know but that I'd be like you

under like circumstances. But, to convince

you we can ride back down the canyon in

sight of Doctor Dave's home and see for

yourself."

Nothing less would satisfy Bondurant, and

so the two rode off down the canyon. They

soon came in sight of Doctor Dave's burning

cabin around which could be seen several In-

dians.

"Is seeing believing?" Fisher asked.

"I am satisfied as to what I can see," re-

sponded Bondurant, "but I am still igno-

rant of whom you are."

"Don't let that trouble you one moment,

Bondurant. You certainly know I am a

friend, and if you'll go with me and wait

further developments, you'll learn in time

that you came very near being the victim of

a foul conspiracy."

Bondurant was thrown into such a state

of confusion and perplexity that he finally

found himself yielding implicit obedience to

the will of Joe Fisher by riding away with

him through the hills. All day they rode

along at a brisk gait, finally drawing up in

the Indian camp about sunset.

At first he thought, as they dismounted in

the camp, that he had been decoyed into

danger, and this thought was strengthened

when, a few minutes later, Kamas Kit and

his band came storming into camp in great

rage.

The Indians, however, received him and

his escort kindly. The executor was escorted

to a lodge and all the favors of an honored

guest shown him. Supper was brought him

and blankets furnished for a couch.

for after his long ride he
n he laid down and gave
ections, and while he was
Fisher came in with Syl-
to whom he introduced

idental remarks, Gascoyne

been conducted here, Mr.
see the chief, Gray Falcon.
As he is sick and cannot call on you, I
will call in the course of an hour and con-
duct you to his lodge."

With this the two men departed, leaving
Bondurant again with his own thoughts,
which were anything but pleasant. What
Gray Falcon could possibly want to see him
for, was beyond his comprehension. How-
ever, he patiently awaited the explanation
of matters, that his friend Fisher had prom-
ised would come in due course of time.

Finally, the man Gascoyne came in and
announced that the chief was ready to re-
ceive him, and the two at once proceeded
toward Gray Falcon Lodge. On the way
Bondurant met with another surprise in dis-
covering Dan Temple in the camp, wounded
and a captive. He would have spoken to
the young ranchero, but, having arrived at
the door of Gray Falcon's lodge, Gascoyne
drew him into the tent, introduced him to
the chief, then turned and left the lodge,
closing the flap-door behind him.

A blazing pine-knot lighted up the chief's
lodge, whose walls and central pole were
hung with clothing and emblems of savage
royalty. On a couch at one side lay the
chief. He was a white man of perhaps sixty
years, with a thin, emaciated face, but eyes
that shone with the luster of youth.

When Bondurant reached down to shake
hands with the chief, the latter extended his
left hand, saying:

"I give you that hand; it's nearest the
heart, Mr. Bondurant."

"I am sorry I find you on your back,
Gray Falcon," Bondurant responded.

"I've not been well for some time," the
chief explained, "and yesterday I was taken
with paralysis of the right arm and leg."

"Well, that's not a very pleasant shape to
be in, I assure you."

"Not for an Indian chief," affirmed Gray
Falcon, "but, under the circumstances, it is
a great relief for me to see you, for there is
no telling what hour I may be called hence."

"I am surprised to hear this, Gray Fal-
con," Bondurant said, "but then this has
been a day of surprises to me."

"I presume so, but I think I can explain
everything," the chief responded; "though,
if it had not been for this sudden attack of
sickness, things might have worked differ-
ently. As you see, I am a white man and
an Indian chief. I have lived among the
red-skins for nearly thirty years, and yet I
have not been wholly ignorant of what has
been going on in the land of civilization,
and even in the State and town in which I was
born and grew to manhood, and fairly edu-
cated for a more useful calling than a savage
chieftain. And now you may be surprised
again when I tell you that I know who Ira
Bondurant is, and why he is in Wyoming.
But it is true, and let me tell you, sir, that
you came within one of being gloriously vic-
timized."

"By whom?" exclaimed Bondurant.

"By that smooth-tongued and polished
old rascal, Doctor Dave, who succeeded in
making you believe that he was Powell
Mitchell, the son of the late venerable Israel
Mitchell of Zanesville, Ohio,"

"Do you mean to tell me Doctor Dave is
not Powell Mitchell?" Bondurant asked.

"I mean to tell you he is an impostor!"
declared the chief, his eyes flashing an em-
phasis that he could throw into his feeble
voice.

"Can you produce evidence of that fact,
Gray Falcon?"

"I certainly can, Mr. Bondurant, in my-
self, for I am Powell Mitchell, the son and
heir of Israel Mitchell!"

CHAPTER XII.

GRAY FALCON'S REVELATION.

IRA BONDURANT was thunderstruck by
Gray Falcon's declaration, and it instantly
dawned upon his mind that there was, in-
deed, a conspiracy somewhere of which he
was the innocent tool—that his labors as exe-
cutor of the estate of Israel Mitchell which,
but a few hours before, he had considered
practically settled, were suddenly rendered
questionable.

"Gray Falcon, you astound me!" he ex-
claimed, "for Doctor Dave—David Bond-
as good proved himself the son and heir of
Israel Mitchell!"

"Of course he did!" calmly responded the
chief; "that was what the old rascal planned
to do, aided by an able confederate."

"But, sir," persisted the astonished exe-
cutor, "David Bond's resemblance to Israel
Mitchell is very marked."

"That may be, but it's simply a coinci-
dence," Gray Falcon said, "and you'll ad-
mit it when I have told my story—presented
my proofs. I can explain how Old David
entrapped you, and tell you exactly who Old
David Bond is."

"Of course it is generally known in Zanes-
ville, or at least was, that Powell Mitchell
was jilted in a love affair, and, like another
fool, pulled up and left the country. I came
West and made my home with the Indians,
adopted their mode of life, fought and hunt-
ed with them, married a squaw, and finally,
became chief of one of the Big Horn tribes
of Sioux. But, what I have been doing
here these thirty years is nothing in particu-
lar to you. Do you remember, or did you
ever hear that, a few nights after Powell
Mitchell disappeared from Zanesville, there
was an attempted bank robbery in town in
which the night watch was killed?"

"Oh, yes!" replied Bondurant, "I was
quite a boy at the time, but I remember it
well. Suspicion rested on one Jack Noble,
who was a bright, yet tough, young man.
He was in town the day before the bank
murder, but disappeared and has never been
heard of since. And, by the way, there
were some who intimated that young
Mitchell had a hand in the attempted robbery
simply because the father of the girl who
jilted him was president of the bank; but no
one who knew Powell ever believed he'd any
hand in it."

"No, he had not," Gray Falcon resumed;
"but, the fact is, Jack Noble fled to the
Western wilds to escape arrest, and took up
his abode with the Indians, also; and, in the
course of time, he became a power in his
tribe—the Great Medicine—in short, Doctor
Dave."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the astonished
Bondurant, "can this be possible?"

"It's true—every word of it," declared
the old chief; "I've known for twenty years
Doctor Dave was Jack Noble. So you can
see yourself that he should know a great deal
about Zanesville of thirty years ago, and
about my father. He and I had been young
men together. He knew my personal history
up to the day I left the town, and presum-
ing upon my being dead, has undertaken to
impose himself upon you for the sought for
heir, knowing that neither you nor any one
living in Zanesville would be likely to detect
the deception."

"Within the past twenty years I have met
Noble—Doctor Dave—a score of times, but
he never recognized me for I was always in
disguise. I did not want him to know me,
for fear my whereabouts would become
known at home. Since I'd made a fool of
myself, and was married to an Ingen woman,
I resolved to continue a fool."

"And now, as to Jack Noble's conspiracy:
six months ago a Denver newspaper drifted
into my camp through a fur-trader. In
readin' it over I came upon an advertisement
sayin', in substance, that if Powell Mitchell,
who left Zanesville thirty years ago was
livin', and should see that advertisement,
and communicate with Ira Bondurant,
executor of the estate of Israel Mitchell,
he'd hear of somethin' to his interest."

"I knew at once what it meant, but I was
down with a broken leg, so I concluded to
dispatch a friend, or one whom I considered
a friend, Seth Craver, to Ohio to learn just
what was wanted of me without makin'
hissself known to you or any one. In this he
succeeded, for Seth is as sharp as he is ras-
cally; and when he reported to me that a
quarter of a million awaited the comin' of
Powell Mitchell, I lay flat on my back,
speechless and helpless with this condemned
paralysis. Of course, I could do nothin' nor
say nothin', and it looked as though my days
were numbered. Seth Craver, it seems,
thought so, too, and when, two months later,
I recovered my health sufficiently to be able
to speak, I found Seth was gone. As he did
not show up I began to mistrust foul play,
and so I called in another friend—the man
who brought you into this lodge—Syl
Gascoyne, as good a detective as ever run a
villain down."

"Well, Syl wasn't out a month till he
struck Seth's trail; and, sure enough, as I'd
mistrusted, found he was playin' me false.
And the scamp had a good chance for it, too,
for, come to find out, Jack Noble had once
been a friend of his, and knew that Jack had
lived in Zanesville and all the circumstances
of his leavin' there. As I'd given the rascal
my family history, he'd sought out Doctor
Dave and the two entered into a conspiracy
to get my legacy, believin' that I was on
my death-bed, or at least, a speechless para-
lytic."

"Doctor Dave entered into the scheme
with a will. How Gascoyne shadowed
Craver and got out all his schemes'd take
till mornin' to tell. Gascoyne can tell you
that at another time. But, it was through
the cunning work of Craver that you were
finally led to the cabin of Doctor Dave yes-
terday. I could have nipped the game in
the bud a month ago, but, as we had the ras-
cals under close watch, we concluded to let
them go ahead and pounce upon them in the
hour of their supposed victory, catch them
all together and make them own up in your
presence to their dirty work."

"It was with this intention that I came
with a few of my warriors down into these
hills; but, day before yesterday, I had an-
other stroke of paralysis that laid me up and
we went into camp here. But, faithful
Gascoyne was on hand yesterday when you
landed with the ranchmen at Doctor Dave's
cabin, and when he reported to me, that re-
port was that Doctor Dave's claim was all-
sufficient."

"But, my friend," said Bondurant, "I
have never, in all my search for Powell
Mitchell, known such a man as this Seth
Craver, you speak of giving me pointers."

"Of course not," the chief replied, "he's
too shrewd to let his hand be seen durin' the
game. However, as I could not go on, I
dispatched Kicking Horse and a party of
warriors to bring Doctor Dave and his
daughter and yourself to my camp, while
Kamas Kit and his men were to bring in
Seth Craver who, for the past week or two,
has been working as a cowboy on the Cross-
Bar Ranch. Kit brought in his man who is
now a prisoner near, but with the exception
of yourself, Kicking Horse's trip was a fail-
ure. On arriving at Doctor Dave's cabin,
his daughter had gone away, you were out
ridin', and Doctor Dave alone was at home."

"And him your warriors killed," Bondur-
ant said.

"The old fool, on being told he must go

with my warriors, flew into a passion and killed two of my braves which resulted in his own death. His death I regret on account of his daughter, a very pretty girl, I am told. But, this is just how the matter stands, Mr. Bondurant."

"Well, Gray Falcon," Bondurant said in perplexity, "this beats any thing I ever heard of. Doctor Dave in admitting he was Powell Mitchell told a very plain, straightforward story of his past life. He even declared, at first, he would not touch the inheritance, and it was not until we had talked late into the night that he finally concluded that he would."

"That was all done for effect, Mr. Bondurant," Gray Falcon observed; "I might say the same and mean it, for, in fact, the money will do me no good. My days are about numbered. I feel that I cannot long survive this attack of sickness. But I have a daughter to whom the money might come well. True, there's Ingin blood in her veins, but she is young and pretty. I would like to have her placed in some good school and educated, and I would be willing that Doctor Dave's daughter, now that she is fatherless, be kindly cared for and educated, also."

"You say you have Craver a prisoner?" Bondurant observed, after several moments' silence.

"Yes, and he's already confessed to me his whole base treachery," answered the chief.

"I should like to talk with him," Bondurant said. "Of course, I do not dispute your claim, but, as you must know, your revelation has put a different phase upon the question, and breaks me all up. I want to be fair in the matter, and, if you are the heir, you'll get the money, and a big pile of it. I should like, also, to have a talk with your detective, Syl Gascoyne."

"All right, Mr. Bondurant; I will arrange it so that you can have a talk with both of them in the morning. I shall claim your company now until you wish to retire, which may not be long, for I presume you are tired after your ride of to-day."

"Another question I would like to ask you, Gray Falcon: why is that young ranchman, Dan Temple, here a prisoner?"

"I was goin' to tell you 'bout him awhile ago, but it slipped my mind," the chief answered. "Kamas Kit and his men were escortin' Doctor Dave's daughter to this camp. When some two miles below here she leaped from her saddle and endeavored to escape in the dark. She turned into a defile and finally sought refuge in the camp of four white men, one of whom was the young rancher. Kamas's men pursued the girl and when they reached that camp the four men refused to let her go, and so they got into a fuss. The ranchman was knocked senseless and the others ran off. Temple was brought here to have his wounds dressed. He is not exactly a prisoner, but will be kept here till mornin', at any rate."

"And Miss Bond, where is she?"

"She has not been found, but men are out searching for her. They will find her."

"It seems to me I have heard Kamas Kit spoken of as an outlaw, Gray Falcon. How is that?"

"He is so called, I will confess," the chief frankly admitted, "but you need have no fears on that score. You are my guest and no harm will befall you. In fact, it is all important to me that your life be carefully guarded, for I hav'n't a single doubt of my being able to fully satisfy you of my being Powell Mitchell, despite the fact of Doctor Dave havin' led a big trump."

Bondurant remained an hour or so longer with the chief who plied him with a hundred questions regarding people he had known at Zanesville thirty years previous. In fact, the chief went over about the same grounds that Doctor Dave had the night before.

The result was that when the executor re-

turned to his own lodge, his brain was in a mad, wild whirl. He was forced to admit to himself that Gray Falcon had presented fully as good, if not a better claim to the inheritance than Doctor Dave, so far as dates, reminiscences of his early life and events were concerned. But, the resemblance of Doctor Dave to the late Israel Mitchell was a sticking point with him that he could not clearly and satisfactorily get around. In fact, it was a point upon which the executor concluded to rest the matter until morning, and taking off his coat he threw himself on his couch and endeavored to forget everything in slumber.

But, sleep he found was impossible. The faces of the rival claimants he could not drive from his mental vision, and it was a relief to his aching brain when a burst of wild excitement outside among the Indians suddenly drew his mind off those faces. Rising he peered out through an opening in the tent, and was startled with an inward shudder of horror at the sight he beheld.

CHAPTER XIII.

NORWAY HAS SOME FUN.

THE discovery of Dan Temple being alive filled Norway's breast with great joy, and to secure his release from the power of his enemies was the subject the three hunters next had under consideration.

Presently another surprise met their gaze. It was the presence of Ira Bondurant in the camp to all appearance a guest instead of a prisoner! Norway recognized him by the description Dan had given him of the man at the time he recounted the bloody work of the savages at the cabin of Doctor Dave. That story, Nels now repeated to the Red River Rogues, when Polar Sol remarked:

"Surely that man, Bondurance, can't be a traitor to the ole hermit."

"It begins to look suspicious," Norway averred, with a shake of his shaggy head, "and if I was sure Alfa Bond wasn't in that devil's nest, I'd be for doin' somethin' desperate. I must do somethin' for Dan before I leave here!"

"If them hyenas 'd go to bed," growled Old Dismal "we could make one o' our fancy Roman sneaks on them and whisk the young rancher out o' that."

"But they don't seem a bit sleepy," replied Sol; "they are like owls and bats, and act jist as if they war oneasy 'bout somethin', or 'spectin' somethin' to turn up."

"Expecting their friend with the gal, Alfa," suggested Norway with grim humor.

"That's 'bout the shape o' it. If they hav'n't found the carcass you so tenderly toted off up the defile, they prob'ly think he's out yit with the gal."

As time passed on the Indians and outlaws maintained their wakefulness—standing, sitting and walking about the camp, keeping up their fires as though they intended to put in the night that way.

The girl, Raven-Eyes, was seen to make frequent trips to where Temple lay bound, and finally these visits called out the observation from Old Dismal:

"That gal's struck on the handsome young rancher, sure as death."

"I hope so, for the boy's sake," added Norway; "he'll not be neglected while he's there. But, pards, this is gittin' terrible monotonous standin' 'round here, and I'm goin' to amuse them purgatorians a little jist for the fun o' the thing."

As he spoke he felt around on the ground for a rock about one-third the size of his fist which he informed the "Rogues" he meant to hurl across the canyon among the enemies' horses.

"Boy, that's a cannon's throw!" declared Polar Sol; "and if the dornick falls in the openin', it'll be sure to give us away by the direction in which it bounces off."

"Throwin' stones is one o' the old-time ments," Norway replied, "and I'll land this stone far beyond the mark. I'll try it anyhow."

Lopping off a few boughs of the thicket among which they stood, to give a clear swing, the young Ajax sent the stone flying through the air over the camp.

And whether it hit a horse or not, it caused commotion enough among them to draw two or three Indians into the bushes to make an investigation.

"Boy, you're an old Jovian catapult," complimented Polar Sol. "That war an Old Master throw."

Nels made no reply, but finding another stone of the proper size, he sent it after the other just as the three red-skins emerged from the thicket into the light of the camp-fire. The result was a general excitement among the horses. One of them, evidently hit by the stone, broke loose and went crashing away among the pines, almost creating a panic.

Two-thirds of the red skins and outlaws, grasping their weapons, rushed into the bushes under the impression that enemies were endeavoring to run off their animals.

The Red River Rogues chuckled each other in the ribs, and all but broke into an outburst of laughter, while Norway Nels stood watching the foe, his great frame shaking with suppressed mirth.

"That's fun-royal, Roman fun!" declared Sol in a whisper, "and, oh, land o' the midnight! how I'd like to see a fair-sized dornick slap Kickin' Hoss in the stomache! Wouldn't it make him curl magnificently? Wouldn't his head and heels clap together immediately sudden?"

"I'd hand him one," said Norway, "if I wer'n't afraid the sharks would git onto our location by the way the stone'd strike. If I could drop it straight down from the clouds on his head, they couldn't tell the direction it came from 'cept from above. Another one in the bushes, though, won't do us no harm, and 'll keep the mud-skins stirrin'."

So saying, he threw another stone over camp into the thicket, and it was instantly heard from in the way of a wild, unearthly shriek of pain that fairly pierced the heavens.

"Salvation, oh! you belted a muddy that time, boy!" exclaimed Dismal. "Just hear the hornits buzz! and see Kamas Kit bob around on that lame foot!"

The red-skin's yell had created the wildest excitement in camp, and in dire suspense those around the fire awaited an explanation.

Presently two outlaws emerged from the thicket carrying an Indian from whose lips were issuing low moans of agony. As the men approached the light, all saw that one side of the red-skin's face was terribly lacerated, and that blood was not only streaming from the horrible wound, but from the fellow's nose and ears as well.

"What has done this?" exclaimed Kamas Kit, as the men laid the howling warrior on the ground before the fire.

"I guess a hoss kicked him," answered one of the outlaws.

The injured warrior being in a dazed condition could give no account of his injuries, but kept up a moaning wail of agony that Nels and the Rogues could distinctly hear.

Kamas examined the wound and declared:

"That don't look much like a horse's track. The skin is tore downward and looks as if it'd been done with the poll of a hatchet or some blunt-edged weapon—there! by Judas Iscariot! goes another yelp! What in the thunder's the matter out in that thicket?"

Another cry of pain, true enough, had emanated from the bushes, and presently an outlaw came reeling into the light with his

Norway Nels, the Big Boy Mountaineer.

lunging at his side, his face con-
agony.

"the matter with you?" thundered
chief; "kicked by a hoss, too?"

"somethin' and my arm broke!
groaned the unlucky freebooter,
olling in frenzy, and the perspir-
ing in great drops from his face.

"what does it mean, anyhow, Cap?"
ed an outlaw of his chief.

"captain," spoke in Syl Gascoyne, who
had been attracted from his tent by the red-
skin's moans, "there's something wrong out
there in that thicket. Surely these folks
can't be belting each other in the dark, this
way."

The greatest excitement now prevailed in
camp. Orders were given for a thorough
search of the thicket, and soon a dozen flam-
ing torches were moving through the bushes
accompanied by, at least, half the entire
camp.

Norway and his companions enjoyed the
sight in great glee, since it never seemed to
occur to the Indians and their allies to search
the west side of the canyon where the author
of their trouble was secreted.

Kamas Kit and Syl Gascoyne, in the mean
time, were employed in binding up the
wounds of the Indian and outlaw, ably as-
sisted by Raven-Eyes.

Norway Nels had let up on his bombard-
ment of the thicket while this last search was
in progress; but the absence of most of the
foe from camp, and presence of Dan Temple
still in plain view, suggested the thought,
which found expression in these words:

"Pards, now would be a glorious time for
us to dash in and rescue the rancher."

"And knock over Kickin' Hoss and swat
Kamas Kit at the same time," added Polar
Sol.

"If the boy's able to walk," remarked Dis-
mal, "we could easily run him out by mak-
in' a Roman rush. The only danger'd be in
Old Sol. He's sich a walrustian ole fool
'bout weemin, that if that gal yander'd speak
one word to him, he'd fall at her feet."

"I'll confess, Dis, that I've a weakness for
pretty gals, mountain scenery and Ingin-
fightin', but if that gal wants me she can
come and get me, and I'll throw you in to
boot. You'd make a splendid pet for an In-
gin gal, Dis."

Before the hunters had decided upon any
plan of action for Temple's rescue, the golden
opportunity for a successful strike had
passed. The Indians and outlaws began to
return from their fruitless search. The
horses had all been quieted down, and in a
short time an unusual stillness reigned over
the camp.

"Now, pards," said Nels, "we've let one
opportunity to rescue Dan'l pass, but I'm
goin' to create another—I'm goin' to shell
that timber again, and if another as good
chance offers, I'm goin' to make a dash for
the ranchman."

"The Red River Rogues'll be found right
at your side, my boy, ready for anything,"
assured Dismal Dave.

The possibilities of Dan's rescue, and their
escape from the canyon with him, were dis-
cussed pro and con. All knew it would be a
hazardous undertaking, with but one chance
in ten of success, and yet they finally decided
to risk that one.

Norway finally began "shelling" the ene-
mies' horse-corral—throwing one stone after
another in rapid succession over the camp
into the thicket. As the missiles rained
down from the darkness among the horses,
the animals became more frightened than
ever, several breaking loose and dashing
madly away.

Again the Indians uttered a cry of alarm
and with their white friends, or most of
them, charged into the thicket, certain now
of meeting the skulking foe that had repeat-
edly tried to stampede their animals.

With the exception of Kamas Kit, the

man with the broken arm, and the wounded
red-skin, the camp was now deserted.

The wildest confusion broke forth in the
thicket. The snorting, lunging horses, the
yells of the Indians, the shouts and curses of
the outlaws endeavoring to quiet the horses,
an occasional cry of pain induced by plung-
ing hoofs, were commingled in one wild and
frantic racket.

Ira Bondurant, for the fourth time that
night, started from his couch to learn the
cause of the frightful noise. Old Gray Fal-
con dragged himself to the door of his lodge
and thrust his haggard face out into the light,
while his daughter, Raven-Eyes, trembling
in terror, shied off toward Dan Temple who
had, also, become somewhat interested in
what was going on in the thicket and rose to
a sitting posture.

Kamas Kit stood, revolver in hand, ready
for the worst, his eyes flashing and his
face wearing the expression of a hunted
beast.

"Raven-Eyes, what does that noise mean?"
Dan Temple asked, as the maiden came up
to him.

"I do not know," she answered, in evident
alarm; "but I fear the friends of—"

She did not finish the sentence, for at that
instant she found herself face to face with a
Titan form that seemed to have been silent-
ly conjured up out of the earth.

It was Norway Nels, the big Scandinavian
hunter that stood before her.

CHAPTER XIV.

A LIVELY RUSTLE.

UNOBSERVED by any one had the Nor-
wegian Hercules glided from the shadows on
the west side of the canyon to the side of his
young friend, Dan Temple.

Raven-Eyes, upon discovering him, was so
startled with superstitious fear that, for a
moment or two, her lips were sealed and her
tongue paralyzed.

Temple glanced up and seeing his big
friend exclaimed:

"My God! Norway, what do you mean?"

"To release you!" was the hunter's re-
sponse, and, stooping, he cut the young
ranchman's bond.

This broke the spell that had silenced
Raven-Eyes' voice, and she quickly gave ut-
terance to a scream that would have dis-
mayed a young panther. It reached the ears
of Kamas Kit despite the noise in which he
was deeply engrossed beyond him. He turn-
ed and, seeing what was up, gave a frantic
yell and began firing his revolver in the air
to give the alarm—not daring to fire at Nor-
way for Raven-Eyes stood screaming between
him and the big hunter.

To add to this new excitement Gray Fal-
con poked his head out of his lodge and set
up a yelling that was sufficient evidence of
Raven-Eyes having inherited her lung-power
from the paternal side of her family.

The Indians and outlaws hearing the yell-
ing and firing in camp, came pouring from
the thickets like wolves. It required no
words to acquaint them with the situation,
and with demoniac yells they dashed on
through the camp after the fugitives.

Having severed the young ranchero's
bonds, Norway assisted him to his feet, say-
ing:

"Come, Dan'l, put in your best licks!"

Dan staggered and would have fallen had
his friend not supported him. His limbs
were numb from long-impaired circulation
caused by the tightness of his bonds; but
Norway perceiving this, placed his arm
around his waist, and thus, half-carrying
him, hurried him across the opening. They
had almost reached the cover of the bushes
where the Red River Rogues were watching
and waiting, when they were suddenly met
by a difficulty not expected: Raven-Eyes,
seeing they were likely to escape, flew after
them like a young tigress, and, coming
up behind Dan, threw her arms about his

neck, and with a frantic hug caused the ran-
chero to reel backward and fall, a cry of pain
escaping his lips as he went down.

Nels again assisted him to rise, but again
he fell with a cry.

"Norway, my ankle's dislocated!" Dan
averred; "leave me and save yourself!"

"Never!" declared Nels, turning to meet
a savage, who, being swift of foot, was some
distance in advance of his friends, and close
upon the fugitives.

With uplifted tomahawk the red skin
rushed madly on and aimed a blow at Nels's
head; but the young giant dodged the wea-
pon, and then lunged forward and gave the
warrior a drive on the neck with his fist that
lifted him off his feet and dropped him ten
feet away.

In the mean time Polar Sol, seeing how
things were going, slipped out of the bushes
to his friend's assistance. Seizing the spirited
little princess, Raven-Eyes, he dragged her
away from Dan, and then for awhile it
seemed, from the way she lit into the old
Red River Rogues, that some one would
have to rescue him.

Having disposed of the red-skin, Nels
lifted Dan to his one foot and ran with him
into the bushes.

By this time other savages were coming
close, and, in hopes of checking their ad-
vance, Old Dismal opened upon them with
his revolver from the shadows where he had
been posted.

Polar Sol expected a volley from the foe
in return, and his quick brain instantly con-
ceived an expedient that might prevent it.
Seizing Raven-Eyes in his arms, he bore her
away, after Norway and Temple, into the
bushes; but, if the fear of killing their young
princess forbade the savages firing upon the
foe, her capture incited them to renewed ex-
ertions in the pursuit.

The moment, however, that Sol reached
the cover of the bushes, he placed the little
tigress on her feet and released her. In-
stantly her cries of anger ceased; but, in-
stead of endeavoring to escape, she not only
stood her ground, but astonished the fugi-
tives by saying:

"Go, pale-faces! Hurry! they will kill
you all!"

All heard this urgent request, but, there
was no time to inquire into the cause of the
girl's sudden change of heart. The pursu-
ing horde were close upon them, and the
three hunters turned, and with their revolv-
ers poured volley after volley into the very
faces of the foe, the Red River Rogues in
the mean time giving utterance to vociferous
yells of bloody defiance.

The hunters had a decided advantage in
that they could see the foe between them
and the light of the camp-fires, and were
thus enabled to make their shots count,
while the savages still refrained from firing,
no doubt, through fear of killing Raven-
Eyes. The result was that the advance of
the foremost of the red-skins was checked,
but by this time the whole camp was swarm-
ing across the canyon and spreading out to
cut off retreat up or down the canyon.

To contend longer with this overwhelming
force would be certain death, and, as Temple
could not walk unaided, Norway saw that
escape from the canyon then would be im-
possible, and that refuge in the bear cave
would be their only salvation.

"Come, pards!" he exclaimed, as the foe
staggered back before their deadly revolvers.
"let's make for the cave!"

The four hurried away through the dense
gloom of the thicket, Raven-Eyes being left
to go her way.

Up the wooded slope they sped, Norway
carrying Dan in his arms as though he was
a child.

They soon reached the entrance to
bear-den and placing Dan on the ground,
big hunter said:

"Slide in there, Dan'l!"

a risk, Dan'l, from beginnin' to Nels philosophically, "and if to-night, all right. Sol and hold the fort here, and if I clear alive you'll hear from me inside four hours. Pard, the verdict's I'm goin' to make the break." Old listen to no protest—no argue had set his head upon going and did. Bidding his friends good-by he from the cave and was gone.

Like suspense Dan and the hunters held their breath as he departed. Ten seconds had elapsed, and they were assuring themselves that the crisis had passed, when suddenly the crash of firearms mingled with a demoniac yell burst like a thunderbolt on their ears.

"My God!" exclaimed Dan, "they've discovered the boy! Norway Nels will never escape!"

"Hark!" whispered Polar Sol, and silence being thus imposed, they all listened for several moments when the old hunter continued: "By the sword o' Gideon! they have not got the boy yet, and it's catchin' before hangin'! Do you observe that yellin' is growin' fainter—trailin' off down the canyon? There's after the boy, but I'll bet Old Dismal's scalp they don't—"

There was a flash in the mouth of the cave, a bullet flattened against the rear wall as the stunning crash of a rifle drowned the speaker's voice.

Raven-Eyes had carried out her threat, and revealed their hiding-place to her friends!

CHAPTER XVI.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

IT now became necessary for the three besieged men to keep well behind the angles of the walls out of line with the mouth of the bear-den, for there was no telling what moment a bullet would be sent in.

The bushes outside not only made a covert for the foe, but formed an impenetrable background of darkness over the entrance to the cave so that it was impossible to see anything.

The ear alone had to be relied upon, and Polar Sol, revolver in hand, took a position where he could not only hear, but where he could return the shot should another be fired.

An hour or two of unusual quiet, however, followed. The yelling down the canyon had entirely ceased, or, at least, the besieged could hear nothing more of it, and they were feeling pretty happy in the belief that Norway had made good his escape, when suddenly their ears were greeted with a new outburst of savage demonstrations.

What it meant, of course, they could not tell, unless Norway's pursuers had, after all, returned with him a captive. The confusion did not seem to be exactly one of triumph, but rather of disappointment and dismay; but no difference what it was, the besieged were compelled to pass the remainder of that night in painful suspense and uncertainty.

The noise in camp had scarcely subsided when, all at once, there was another flash and report outside and a bullet was sent into the cave to remind the besieged that the place was being watched. And, to give those watching to understand that the besieged were not napping, Polar Sol sent a shot at the spot where he had seen the flash in front of the cave. To his utter astonishment an unearthly savage yell answered the shot—a genuine yell of agony.

"A lovely snap-shot, Polar!" whispered Old Dismal. "You winged the varmint without a doubt, you noble Old Master."

But whether he hit a red-skin or not, no more bullets were fired into the cave. The enemy, however, were not idle. The sound of ax-blows and the rustle of bushes were the next diversions. What they were up to the Rogues could not make out at the time, but presently Sol noticed it was growing lighter

about the mouth of the cave as the work outside went on, and, finally, they discovered that the red-skins were clearing away the bushes from in front of their retreat.

When three or four rods of the slope around the entrance to the bear-hole had been denuded of its shrubbery, the red-skins built a fire at one side of the place so that its light shone over the clearing.

"I hope now the varmints are happy," Dismal remarked. "They've got the entrance o' this hole in full view, and the bushes cut away outside so that if we should be fools enough to walk out they could warp it to us. They've gone to lots o' trouble for nothin'."

By turns Sol and Dismal kept watch. The fire was kept burning outside, which was really of as much advantage to the hunters as to their foes, for while they had no thought of leaving the cave, the light enabled them to see that no one entered.

Thus the night was spent, and when daylight came the hunters found that the removal of the bushes from in front of their retreat enabled them to see right over into Gray Falcon's camp.

This was a very pleasant discovery, for it enabled them to observe what was going on, and Polar Sol took a position to watch proceedings, and ascertain if possible whether Norway Nels had been made prisoner or not.

"The vagrants," he reported to his friends, "are all frisking around quite peart. Some o' them are brillin' meat for breakfast, some o' them are comin' and goin' 'mong the hosses, and some monkeyin' with guns. Zip! there goes that little firebrand, Ravin'-Eyes; frisky as a doe; if she'd look this way I'd throw her a kiss—ouch! there goes Kamas Kit, limpin' from a tent! Kamas is pretty lame, I can tell you. There stands that white man you called Bondurance, Dan'l, talkin' to that bad, bold Kickin' Hoss. He seems to be a free, privileged character there. But I can see nothin' o' big Norway Nels, for I guess he's not there. But, pard, if I wasn't afraid the varmints'd change their camp, I'd go to flingin' lead outen here with old Milinda, in two seconds. I'd want no better sport than to set here and pick them hellyons off one by one."

And thus for an hour Polar Sol continued to take observations, and report to his friends.

In the mean time the enemy had eaten breakfast. After their repast all began stirring about in a manner that indicated a lively demonstration of some kind. Sol watched them closely, in hopes of being able to determine what they meant to do; but whatever it may have been, their preparations were suddenly interrupted by the presence of something in the canyon below camp.

Immediately every face was turned in one direction, and all stood as if rooted to the spot.

Sol could not see, owing to his narrow range of vision, what startling object held them in such silent amazement; but he was not long kept in ignorance, for, presently, an Indian appeared in camp, with the lithe figure of a young girl, with hatless head and flowing hair, walking at his side.

"Sword o' Gideon!" burst in painful accents from Polar Sol's lips, "*they have at last recaptured the gal, Alfa Bond!*"

CHAPTER XVI.

A THUNDERBOLT FALLS.

IRA BONDURANT, the executor, passed a restless night in Gray Falcon's camp, and was glad when morning came.

Between outbursts of excitement that periodically disturbed the night, he endeavored to review the situation and circumstances surrounding the new claimant; for, while he was not ready to question the claim of Gray Falcon, the white chief, to the property of Israel Mitchell, he was satis-

fied that he was in an unholy alliance with the outlaws who seemed very active in his interest.

The presence of young Temple, a prisoner his final release by friends, the fight and death of several men, the besieging of the rescuer in the bear-cave, the fury and wicked threats of Kamas Kit, all went to show that the allies were at war with the hunters and ranchmen—in fact, with all men of law and order. It is true, he could find no fault with his own treatment; but, notwithstanding, it was a blessed relief when the night had passed and the light of day dispelled the gloom from his mind as well as the canyon.

As soon as breakfast was over he repaired to the lodge of Gray Falcon, and, after a short conversation, informed the chief that he would like now to have a talk with his detective, Syl Gascoyne; also, with the man, Seth Craver.

The chief dispatched Raven-Eyes for Gascoyne, who soon appeared in the lodge, stroking his long black beard and bowing politely to the chief and his guests.

"Syl," said Gray Falcon, addressing Gascoyne, "you will be seated and tell Mr. Bondurant how you got onto Seth Craver and Doctor Dave's plot to rob me of my rights."

Gascoyne seated himself and began his story, and as he talked on in a smooth, modulated tone, there was something so vaguely familiar in his voice that, half the time Ira Bondurant lost the run of his story, in his endeavors to recall when and where he had heard that voice before. The more he tried, however, the more confused he became, and, at last, he made up his mind, before the man had finished, that the fellow's big, full beard was a disguise behind which, he had no doubt, was concealed a face that he would recognize were it uncovered.

Be that as it might, Gascoyne's story was suddenly interrupted by a buzz of excitement outside in the camp, and turning, he looked out. An exclamation of surprise broke from his lips, and rising, he hurried from the lodge without offering an excuse for so doing.

Bondurant saw the fellow was unduly excited, and, excusing himself to Gray Falcon, he followed the reputed detective out.

The cause of the excitement was the presence of Alfa Bond in camp. The executor recognized her at a glance, though her beautiful face wore a look of scorn and defiance, and her dark eyes flashed with an unnatural light as she confronted the two-score of delighted red-skins and outlaws.

The girl had been brought to camp by the red-skin who, since daylight, had stood alone on guard down the canyon. He reported her on her way to camp of her own accord—that she had even begged him to accompany her to camp.

Advancing through the crowd into the girl's presence, Bondurant addressed her thus:

"Good heavens! Alfa, what has brought you here into this camp?"

"The desire, Mr. Bondurant," the girl responded, her voice tremulous with passion, "to avenge my father's death! I am glad to find you still alive, though it is a wonder these murderous wretches have spared you."

"I was deeply grieved to hear of your father's death, Alfa," Bondurant returned, "but surely these men and warriors will not harm you."

"Harm me?" she exclaimed, flashing a look of contemptuous disdain at the leering faces before her; "Mr. Bondurant, these creatures are human vultures; they will destroy me soul and body, if they can!"

"Now, gal, look here," put in Kamas Kit, "you don't believe that else you'd never come here of yer own will. Come, now, be fair with us. We hunted for you all night. Your runnin' away give us oceans of fear and uneasiness."

"If you meant no harm to me, why did you not let me remain with the hunters?" demanded Alfa.

"We didn't want you with such toughs," as Kamas Kit's cowardly answer.

"And what did your murderous hands do with the young ranchman, Daniel Temple?" the girl demanded, the fire of her flashing eyes seeming to search the soul of the shrinking, cowardly outlaw.

"Ah!" Kamas Kit exclaimed; "so you're here lookin' for that handsome young cow-uncher, eh? Well, he killed a man last night, but for all that we kindly brought him here and dressed his wounds, and then we killed a few of Gray Falcon's warriors and dragged Daniel into that bear-hole that you can see over yonder. I forgot Dan Temple, for, unlike his namesake of old, he'll not escape from the lion's den. You'd better go into Raven-eyes's lodge and get a bite to eat, and take a little nap, for you're tired and sleepy, and as good as a little bear."

"Sir, I am the daughter of the White Medicine, Doctor Dave!" she exclaimed, raising herself up proudly, defiantly. My father's voice is silent, but mine is still strong in the council of the Sioux, and strong enough to be heard across the hills. The blood of the White Medicine courses in my veins. You have murdered my father! You are the enemies of my father's people! You have come here in power! Though the night was dark, and the mountains full of dangers, my spirit was strong, my feet enduring and swift—"

"Oh, botheration!" Kamas Kit broke in; "girl, you're crazy! Go into that tent and sleep still till you're rested, or you'll be a ravin' maniac!"

"Never into the lodge of my enemy, unless dead or by force!" exclaimed the maiden, her Indian blood aroused.

"Well, what do you want, then?" the outlaw asked.

"The release of the pale-faces yonder," said she pointed across toward the bear cave.

"Anything else?"

"Yes; I demand the murderers of my father, that they may suffer for the crime," was the astonishing reply.

"My dear little girl," said Kamas, with much regret, "your wishes can hardly be complied with in a single instance. Just think how many deaths your father has caused in his time in the ranks of these red-men! I could not grant your wish, even if I was disposed to do so. But, sick and feeble, Gray Falcon lies in yonder tent; if you can make any terms with him, you are at liberty to do so, and I will take pleasure in escorting you into his lodge."

"Gray Falcon," came the shrill, sharp voice of that worthy himself, who had been listening to all that had passed between Kit and Alfa, "will make no compromise with one of the blood of the impostor, Doctor Dave!"

"That settles it," decided Kamas Kit.

"That settles it," repeated Alfa Bond, as she began backing off from the crowd, at the same time clasping her hands above her head, while her dark eyes flashed with a strange, fierce light.

Believing she meant to turn and flee, Kicking Horse advanced with quick footsteps to seize her. But, he never did. He had taken scarcely five steps when the giant figure of a white man was seen to step from the bushes not forty paces away, throw his rifle to his shoulder and fire, the bullet piercing the chief's brain.

The giant slayer was Norway Nels!

A frantic yell of rage and vengeance burst from the lips of the red-skins and outlaws, and as one the whole crowd surged toward the hunter. But at the same moment, almost, there arose from cover of the bushes, along the base of the bluff behind Norway Nels, another Indian war-cry that seemed to

issue from a hundred brazen throats, and then from the covert burst a legion of painted forms, that advanced to meet in battle the followers of Gray Falcon and Kamas Kit.

They were Sioux, and had come to avenge the death of their White Medicine, Doctor Dave!

CHAPTER XVIII.

A BLOODY CONFLICT.

FULL well the followers of Gray Falcon knew the war-cry of their red foe, and their own advance was checked by the sights and sounds that burst upon eye and ear.

Ira Bondurant could not realize what was coming until the friends of Doctor Dave and Gray Falcon had met in the shock of a terrible battle, and he heard the whistle of bullets above his own head. To elude these he turned and hastened toward the west side of the canyon. His first thought was of seeking refuge in the cave where he knew Dan Temple and friends were besieged, for already he saw the four savages who had been guarding the cave, coming on the run to take a hand in the battle.

As he passed the lodge of Gray Falcon, he was astounded to see the hitherto decrepit old man come bounding therefrom with a demoniac yell, and go speeding away to battle with all the suppleness and vigor of youth!

Meanwhile, Kamas Kit was making better use of the precious moments. He watched the horde of enemies pouring into sight, until it seemed the base of the bluff was dissolving into Sioux warriors. His surprise and new born fear magnified their numbers threefold, and as the forward movement of his friend had now landed him in the rear, he turned and limped away to the nearest horse, which he began to saddle and bridle for flight. He was just ready to mount when a bullet struck him, and he dropped to the earth, while over and along the canyon rolled the report of a rifle, from the direction of the bear-cave.

Bondurant looked ahead with a start, for the bullet whistled but a few feet above his head. He saw Polar Sol and Old Dismal coming on a run, the muzzle of the latter's rifle still smoking.

Down past the now fairly bewildered executor dashed the Old Red River Rogues toward the scene of battle, yelling like a pair of excited madmen. As Bondurant turned to watch them, he saw Alfa Bond glide from the midst of the combatants and come running toward him. He advanced to meet her.

"Mr. Bondurant!" she exclaimed as she approached, wild with excitement, "have no fears, for they are the friends of my poor, dead father! Oh! it is dreadful! but they brought it all on themselves by murdering my father!"

"Miss Alfa," responded Bondurant, betraying no little uneasiness, "this whole affair is a horrible piece of work! I do not understand it! Did you bring those Indians here, Alfa?"

The maiden did not answer, for at this moment she saw Dan Temple, with blood-shot eyes and feverish face, come limping toward them from the cave. She ran to meet him, greeting him with a passionate fervor that for several moments could find expression only in sobs and tears. Bondurant joined them, being warmly greeted by the young ranchman, who said:

"Mr. Bondurant, you're having a lively experience."

"But, so far, you seem to have had the worst of the two, Temple," the executor responded.

"Oh, Dan!" Alfa suddenly exclaimed, "how thoughtful it was of you to send word of father's murder to his red friends!"

"Ah! so I did!" exclaimed Dan; "I'd almost forgotten the fact. But, where have

you been, dear Alfa, since our parting last night?"

"Believing you were slain, I was determined to reach the Indian village to know these hills well; but on the way my father's friends coming. Your message had aroused them. I turned back to find them. We soon met the brave, big Norway Nels. He was on his way to the Sioux village for help. He told me that you and the other men were alive, and approached this camp alone in order to persuade the Indian on guard to come here with me. Norway Nels and the Sioux then followed up the canyon concealed behind the bushes."

Meanwhile the battle was on in its fury. The Red River Rogues struck Gray Falcon's forces on the right, and with all their old-time spirit hurled themselves into the fight with clubbed rifles, and like a cyclone mowed their way into the ranks of the foe.

Gray Falcon knew it was victory or death, for the presence of the Sioux there with Alfa Bond told him they had come to avenge the death of Doctor Dave. It was a danger he had never dreamed could come so soon. In fact, the attack was a complete surprise. The odds were two to one against him, but this fact only made him fight the harder. Side by side the outlaws fought with their savage friends. Kamas Kit alone was the craven, coward; but the bullet from Old Dismal's rifle had checked his flight.

Hand to hand the combat raged. Revolvers, tomahawks, knives and clubbed rifles, barked, crushed, cut and smoke.

Bondurant turned from the sight and almost wished he were deaf to the horrible, murderous sounds.

A triumphant yell suddenly burst above the fearful din. It was the yell of victory. Overwhelmed, the followers of Gray Falcon were routed. What few had not been slain broke for cover. The enraged Sioux pursued them, and few, if any, of that two-score escaped to tell the tale of the sanguinary struggle.

The Red River Rogues and Norway Nels met on the bloody field. The latter's face and breast were covered with blood from a frightful wound on the forehead, but in his excitement he was scarcely aware of his being hurt.

Polar Sol led him from the field and proceeded to dress his wounds.

They were soon joined by Dan Temple, Bondurant and Alfa, who all gave their assistance to the old hunter.

Bondurant now paced uneasily to and fro. He could see nothing of Gray Falcon, of Raven-Eyes, of Syl Gascoyne. Had they fallen in the conflict? Were both claimants to the Mitchell estate dead?

While these questions were revolving through his mind, Old Dismal approached and asked:

"Are you Mr. Bondurant?"

"I am Ira Bondurant," answered the executor.

"Then you're wanted up here," said the hunter.

Bondurant went with him to where there were a group of Indians around a prostrate form.

The red-skins fell back as they approached. Upon the ground lay Gray Falcon, wounded unto death. As his eyes met those of Bondurant a grim smile came to his lips, and he said:

"Bondurant, they were too many for us. The game's up with me, and, rather than fall into the Sioux power, my daughter lies in her lodge dead by her own hand."

"Gray Falcon," said Bondurant, kneeling by the chief, "it's all dreadful! horrible! I am soul sick."

"Bondurant," and the old man raised his voice to a higher key, "I've been deceiving you. I am not Powell Mitchell, but Jack Noble, the attempted bank-robber!"

"exclaimed Bondurant, betraying surprise, for since his talk with me he had made up his mind there was no wrong." The chief went on; "as I've got to tell you the truth. I am Jack Bondurant and David Bond was Powell Mitchell. The conspiracy was all on mine and Gascoyne's side. There was no such person as Doctor Dave, though we had a man coached to look like him." Bondurant, had you been less communicative, this would not have occurred. You were the victim of misplaced confidence. Syl Gascoyne was the movin' spirit in the conspiracy. To him you related the story of the waitin' fortune in the Zanesville Bank. You told him of the disappearance of Powell Mitchell, thirty years ago. You told him of your long search—even the particulars—for the lost Powell, and how at last you'd found trace of him."

"Gray Falcon, you are laboring under a mistake," declared the perplexed executor.

"You may think so, but I'm not. You rode from Laramie with Gascoyne; you lodged with him; you slept under his roof—he carried you to Doctor Dave's cabin."

"Then, by heavens! Clinton Roper, the ranchman, is Syl Gascoyne!" averred Bondurant, the mystery of that familiar voice under the heavy black beard explained.

"That's it, exactly!" Gray Falcon went on. "For years, Roper and I have been friends. He once lived with me. He knew, for I told him, my name was Jack Noble, and that I had once lived in Zanesville. When he discovered that the date of Powell Mitchell's and my disappearance were almost identical, he conceived the idea of putting up a job on you and get that great wealth you told was waitin' Powell Mitchell. The scheme was a bold one, but Clint was a bold, cunning man. He knew that I and a party of warriors was in the vicinity, and after leavin' Doctor Dave's cabin the evening he escorted you there, he came direct to my camp and we laid our plot. I had known Powell Mitchell as a young man—known him and his family intimately enough, I thought, to impose myself on you for Powell. Of course, I did not intend to be seen in Zanesville, or outside of these hills. The apparently helpless condition in which you found me was to be my excuse for not leavin' here."

"At the time Roper came to my camp, Kamas Kit was stopping with me. In fact, we were down here on a horse and cattle-stealin' trip. The Brush Creek Ranch was the point we meant to strike. Roper had given us pointers, for he hated Dan Temple, and why? because Dan had supplanted him in the affection of Doctor Dave's daughter. Kamas Kit was taken into the conspiracy. Alfa Bond was to be his share of the spoils. We moved our camp that night up into this canyon for we were only ten miles from Doctor Dave's cabin."

"Roper at the time had a duel with Dan Temple on his hands. It was to come off next day. He was terrible afraid he'd get winged, and so made arrangements with Kamas Kit to appear on the field at the proper moment and relieve him by killin' or capturin' Temple. It was all mean, dirty and cowardly."

"At the same time warriors and some of Kit's men were to proceed to Doctor Dave's cabin and bring you and Alfa here. The old man was to meet the fate he did. You were found and so was Doctor Dave. Alfa had gone away, but was captured on the duel field. The duel was brought to an end, but Temple was left unharmed, because of his good marksmanship."

"Unfortunately for all our plans, Kamas Kit let the girl git away from them last night, and you have seen the result."

She brought the Sioux here to avenge her father's death, and she has done it. But

for this accident I believe we would have succeeded in our scheme."

"You might if I had never discovered that Gascoyne was Clinton Roper," replied Bondurant; "but, Gray Falcon, what would have been the fate of Dan Temple had he not been rescued last night by his friends?"

"He was at the mercy of his rival, Clinton Roper, and you may judge what that mercy would have been."

"Well," said Bondurant, with evident relief, "the scoundrel has made a terrible mess of it, and, I suppose, met his doom in the fight. And while Doctor Dave has been murdered—foully murdered—I hope, Gray Falcon, your God, whom you are soon to meet, may deal mercifully with you for the penitence you have shown in making this confession and clearing up all doubts in my mind."

To fully satisfy himself in regard to Roper, Bondurant and Old Dismal searched among the dead for Gascoyne's body. They found it where the battle had raged the fiercest. Old Dismal caught hold of the long beard which yielded to a slight pull, and, true enough, the face of Clint Roper was revealed. The story of the dying chief had been fully verified. But, the arch-villain had paid the penalty of his conspiracy with his life.

Bondurant went back and remained by Gray Falcon until his death, which occurred some two hours later; and, let it be here said to the credit of the whites that, before they left the camp, out of a spirit of Christian charity, they gave the dead chief and daughter as decent burial as circumstances would permit, Alfa Bond preparing the body of Raven-Eyes for the grave.

All the possessions—horses, camp equipage and arms of the defeated foe were turned over to the victorious Sioux, except those belonging to the Red River Rogues, and a horse each for Bondurant, Dan Temple, Alfa and Norway Nels.

The whites went down the canyon a little way—out of sight of the battle-field—lighted a fire, and prepared dinner of such food as could be found in Gray Falcon's camp. After the repast the horses were brought up, ready for mounting.

Bondurant, Temple and Alfa mounted, and riding back to where the Sioux were in possession of the enemy's camp, bid them good-by, the Indians betraying much feeling at the departure of the daughter of their beloved old medicine-man.

Going back to where the Norwegian and the Red River Rogues were waiting, Dan Temple exacted a promise of them to visit his ranch within a fortnight—while Bondurant and Alfa were his guests; then they bade the hunters an affectionate adieu and rode off down the canyon.

Shortly after their departure the hunters set out for Norway's cabin, where Sol and Dismal were to remain until Nels's wounds had sufficiently recovered to enable him to make the promised visit to Brush Creek Ranch.

The death of Clint Roper, in company with Gray Falcon and Kamas Kit, produced a decided sensation over the Laramie Plains. Even the cowboys on his ranch did not know he was in collusion with the outlaws, although a few of them had regarded some of his lonely excursions away from the ranch as a suspicious circumstance.

Alfa revisited her old home, and with the help of kind hands had her father's remains laid by the side of her mother in that beautiful little valley where for years she had been so happy as a child.

Accepting the hospitality of Dan Temple, Bondurant and Alfa remained on Brush Creek Ranch for nearly a month. In the mean time, Norway Nels and the two old hunters came down to the ranch on their promised visit, and during their stay there was music in the air, in and around the place, for the brave and jolly old Rogues let themselves

loose and went in for an old Roman holiday.

When Ira Bondurant and Alfa finally left for the East, Dan Temple drove them over to the nearest station on the Union Pacific Railway. There Dan and the maiden parted with words of tender, hopeful love, and—

But why add more? Suffice it to say that to-day, Daniel Temple is one of the cattle barons of the West—rich not only in the possession of worldly goods, but a charming little wife whose love and wealth she had placed in his keeping; and in him Alfa has all that the heart of a true wife could wish.

After their visit at the ranch had ended, Norway Nels and the Red River Rogues returned to the mountains, each carrying tokens of love and remembrance from those in whose behalf they had so bravely risked their lives on that memorable night and day in Big Horn Canyon.

THE END.

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